CHRIST WILL GIVE YOU LIGHT

VARIOUS CHRISTIAN ARTICLES

TOM RIGGLE

About the Title
"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says:

'Awake, you who sleep,
Arise from the dead,
And Christ will give you light.'" - Ephesians 5:8-15

About the Cover
The photo was taken at the end of a tedious, hours-long ferry trip from the island of Cebu to Leyte in the Philippines. The passenger area in the ship was down in the windowless hold, seats facing a widescreen monitor playing loud, distracting movies. The ship reminded me of a Monitor also, that windowless metal ship of the Civil War. We would love to have seen the sea we were traversing. But we were trapped throughout the whole day.

Finally, we arrived in the port of Maasin, Leyte. As we were hurried to a waiting van I barely had time to take this photo of the sunset over the strait.

This is a good picture of the life of a Christian in this present world, trapped down below, accosted by unwanted distractions. When all we want is a clearer view of the real world – and the heaven above with all of its ineffable desirability that God's Holy Spirit speaks to us. Hopefully, these articles will help us to see more clearly Heaven and the City whose Builder and Maker is God.

About the Book
This is the fourth book of various articles on Christian subjects. Many of them have to do, directly or indirectly, with Preterism. Others are on more general Christian subjects.

If you are interested in the previous three books, free PDFs or EPUBs, just write to me. The most convenient way is by email: epitom4@gmail.com.

The earlier books are: *Off the Beaten Path*, *We Seek a City*, and *Earthly Images of Heavenly Truths*.

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Apologetics: Valid in Christian Ministry?

Yes and no. A distinction must be first made between *evidentialist* versus *Biblical* apologetics. Biblical apologetics will be discussed further below.

Evidentialists like *John Montgomery*, C.S. Lewis, or Harry Rimmer, Josh McDowell, Norm Geisler, Hugh Ross, Ravi Zacharias, William Lane Craig*, and many more, are those who attempt to convert people by statistics, historical references, historical precedents, etc. Though many evidentialists profess to hold the Word in high regard, they don't seem to hold it in *highest* regard. But can evidence sway a person who is unswayed by the Word? Take a look at **Luke 16:27- 31**:

"*Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' Abraham said to him, 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.' And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.'* "

The rich man pleaded for an *apologetics approach*. But it would have been fruitless. The problem the brothers would have had was not a lack of information, but spiritual blindness and enmity. Only the Word of God (the same Word they had despised) could have cured this evil.

It is also not a meaningless coincidence that most authors of this persuasion are avowed antagonists of Reformed Theology: The underlying foundation for these respective views are starkly opposed to each other. Reformed Theology assumes God's sovereignty in man's salvation. Evidentialism assumes man's "*semi-sovereignty*", or free-will.

"*Personal encounter*" comes, not from the Bible, but from Barthian Neo-orthodoxy, which is neither new nor orthodox, though it has a glitter of both.

"*I accepted Jesus into my heart*", or "*I accepted Jesus as my Savior*" likewise betray synergistic thinking. What really happened in the case of every single true conversion? God opened your heart, like Lydia's. It was a heart operation - and you didn't help at all. You were out, cold... until God said to you "*Live!*", **Ezek. 16:6**. Many Christians who think they were accepting Jesus, letting Him in the door, **Rev. 3:20**, had actually already passed the point of regeneration and were just responding obediently to the One who had already shown Himself to be Lord. They were experiencing, **Phil. 2:12- 13**, God already "[working in them] *to will and do according to His good pleasure*". They were not just then accepting Jesus as Savior; they were obeying Him as Lord.

"*We need to bring them to Christ*". Let's just say that it gives the impression that Christ is immobile. This is all synergistic thinking, as if we and and God make a team, each doing their part in winning souls. Why don't we just preach and teach the Truth? And - if we are speaking to "*life unto life*" hearers - Christ will move (or has already moved) toward them.

"*Inquirers*" and "*seekers*". There are no unsaved inquirers, only excusers ("*There is none who seeks after God*". Once a person becomes an inquirer, it is because they have already had their heart opened. Their new nature prompts them to seek more. The only reason some desire the "*sincere milk of the Word*" is because they are already "*newborn babes*", and have already "*tasted that the Lord is gracious*", **1st Peter 2:2- 3**.

"*Authentication*". Apologetics seeks to authenticate the message. God never asked us to do that. We are to announce it. The Holy Spirit will authenticate it to every one intended. It will be - to these and to these alone - "*a savor of life unto life*". We are called to articulate and to demonstrate (by lives that are obedient to the message), but we do not authenticate. That is the Holy Spirit's work.

Apologetics aims low - and still fails!
Apologetics can only - and that very imperfectly - argue for deism, that God (or "*god*", or even "*gods*") exist. Well, demons believe that. They are doomed deists. Christianity, on the other hand, proclaims, "*Behold your God!*" And those for whom the message is intended will do just that. And they will walk in the works that were prepared for them from all eternity.

"*Reasons to Believe*" (Hugh Ross). For every reason to believe thrown to the seeker of God, he will find more reasons to not believe. Why? Because fallen man is, at heart, unreasonable!
He's unreasonable because he is *dead*.
He is dead because of *sin*.
He will stay dead until he *truly hears* the Word of Life.
And then, being preordained to life, the Word faithfully announced will be his "*Lazarus, come forth!*"
Here is the encouraging joy of Biblical evangelism, seeing the response in some of those to whom we speak.

What about the Biblical term "*Apologetics*"?
It does occur in the New Testament 17 times; that is, the word upon which the concept is based, "*apologia*" (and it's variants). But the definition of this word is not what you might think. Interestingly, the first two times the word occurs, **Luke 12:11; 21:14**, does away for the need for human apologetics ministries. Don't take my word for it, read the passages yourself:

Selected occurrences of Apologia:
*"Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should **answer**, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."* - **Luke 12:11-12**

*"And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his **defense** to the people."* - **Acts 19:33**

"*So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying,'Brethren and fathers, hear my **defense** before you now.'"* - **Acts 21:40-22:1**

*"Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully **answer** for myself"* - **Acts 24:10**

*"while he **answered** for himself, 'Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.'"* - **Acts 25:8**

*"To them I answered, 'It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man [b]to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to **answer** for himself concerning the charge against him.'"* - **Acts 25:16**

*"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' So Paul stretched out his hand and **answered** for himself"* **- Acts 26:1-2**

*"Now as he thus made his **defense**, Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!'"* **- Acts 26:24**

*"who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else **excusing** them)"* **- Rom. 2:15**

*"My **defense** to those who examine me is this:"* **- 1 Cor. 9:3**

*"For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what **clearing of yourselves**, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter*." **- 2 Cor. 7:11**

*"Again, do you think that we **excuse** ourselves to you? We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification."* **- 2 Cor. 12:19**

*"just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the **defense** and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace."* **- Phil. 1:7**

*"The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; 17but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the **defense** of the gospel."* **- Phil. 1:16-17**

*At my first **defense** no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them*. **- 2 Tim. 4:16**

*"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a **defense** to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear"* **- 1 Pet. 3:15**

Biblical Apologetics

The picture emerges from these verses that Biblical apologetics, as far as we can make it a separate concept, is both a sword and a shield. But it is not a fisherman's net, It certainly is not a fishing line! And that is how modern apologetics is cast. We are to speak the Truth in love, proclaim the Gospel, defend the Truth once delivered. But we are not to go beyond this - which is actually going below it, because a changed method means a degraded Message.

NOTE

Interesting footnote from **James Montgomery**'s web page:

"*My world-view was hammered out at university; there I became a Christian. . . . Like the late C. S. Lewis (one of my greatest heroes), I was literally dragged kicking and screaming into the Kingdom by the weight of evidence for Christian truth.*"

But this needs to be a topic by itself. It is interesting to note that almost every evidentialist, seeking to vindicate their methodology, claims something like this: "*The evidence swayed me*". **Hugh Ross** claims that the astronomical and physics evidence did it for him. **C.S. Lewis** claimed the same along literary and philosophical grounds. See "*Surprised by Joy*", "*Pilgrim's Regress*", especially his forward . But this is all contrary to Scripture, **John 3:3**.

Think about it: Where - *anywhere* in Scripture - do we find someone "*dragged kicking and screaming into the Kingdom by the weight of evidence for Christian truth*"? They were converted by the miracles of the incarnate Christ and His Apostles and also by the message preached – the Word of God. The Apostles are no longer here. Neither is Christ here in the flesh on Earth. This leaves the Word of God and the Spirit who never left us.

This should be enough.

I Pledge Allegiance to …

I once taught in a school that started every day with the Pledge of Allegiance. For many of the students, in Paul Simon's words, it was merely a Pledge of Allegiance "*to the wall*". I do not believe that we should have this pledge any more. Not that I am Anti-American, but pro-American (as far as allegiance to an earthly country is called for).

Side note: In this school we also pledged allegiance to the Texas flag. Imagine the divided devotion of pledgers should Texas ever secede from the Union!

Question to those of you who argue for the Pledge of Allegiance: Which one of the writers of the Federalist Papers would have supported this pledge – an innovation of centuries later? Or which of the other founding fathers would have supported it?

Another reason I am against even having a pledge is that it is all symbol and no substance. Instead of wasting time forcing students to mouth words for which they have no understanding or frame of reference why not focus more on teaching the Constitution (warts and all) and writings like the Federalist Papers? Why not teach, carefully and honestly, a history of our country, including both high and low points, examples exemplary as well as those cautionary?

Of course, this is what I tried to do with my students when I was in Texas – teaching, carefully and honestly, a history of our country, including both high and low points – instead of teaching from a simplistic, supposedly Christian, textbook. And the result was my being forced out of the school.

A kind of funny memory I have from this school (which still has lots of good memories for me). I was teaching American history and going off script (that is, not sticking to the textbook talking points) about US involvement in the Philippine War over a century ago, the title of the chapter was something like "Reaching for Glory". As I was highlighting several unsavory events that our military was involved in a student in the front row raised his hand. He asked me, "Are you a Christian?"

And with a straight face too. In the minds of many of these junior high kids, in this military town, everything involving our armed forces was necessarily an extension of Christianity.

Maybe for them the pledge makes perfect sense. A Shibboleth for our times. The American Eagle flying in mid-heaven with an eternal gospel of democracy for the world. Maybe for them the two allegiances are fused into one – *Americanity*.

The Problem with Creeds

Twenty years ago, when I had first entered my Reformed stage (what **RC Sproul Jr**. referred to as the "cage"stage"!) I was quite interested with all things Reformed, including studying out the various Confessions, especially the **Westminster Confession of Faith.** So I am not arguing my case from mere ignorance. Although I still believe in the **Five Sola's** I hesitate to call myself Reformed or Calvinist because of the additional baggage of those two terms.

The biggest obstacle for me would be the creeds and confessions. Partly because, as a Preterist who does not believe in a future physical coming of Christ – He is already here - I find myself on the wrong side of the *Brook Jabbok*, unable to pronounce the Shibboleth of futurist assumptions that have insinuated themselves into the creeds and confessions.

But there is also a general caution about the creeds and confessions. And that is their tendency to impose an interpretive grid over the Word of God. It is very subtle but it happens. It ends up, all too often, that they become our teachers and not the Bible. They guide the unwary reader or student of the Word.

Christ told us:

"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." - **Luke 6:40**

Now, if we admit that confessions and creeds are not as perfect as the Bible, and, on certain points, require explanatory glosses or even corrections then this shows that our would-be teachers (Creeds and Confessions) are not going to get us where we want to be. When we are fully trained we will be like our teachers - walking Creeds and Confessions.

RC Sproul wrote:
"Protestants do not believe that creeds, confessions, and catechisms are infallible — that can only be said of Scripture. But confessional Protestants do believe that creeds, confessions, and catechisms are authoritative insofar as they accurately summarize the teaching of Scripture, which is their primary purpose."
https://www.ligonier.org/blog/why-do-we-recite-apostles-creed/

But a summary is still an interpretation, just like a commentary, only more concise.

A friend of mine, while agreeing with the need for discernment for anything extra-biblical, maintained that creeds and confessions are necessary, and has no patience with those who say they "*just believe the Bible*". He says that this really doesn't tell anyone anything. By contrast, creeds and confessions tells precisely what one believes about the Bible.

But actually, it does tell us something about that person when they say they believe the Bible. Yes, it is a broad, possibly vague, affirmation. Yet it sets the basis for patient probing on the part of the other person. It also weeds out the many who do not believe the Bible.

On the other hand, there are some who say they believe Confession X or Creed Y but when pressed on a particular issue will betray a private glossary of interpretation when it comes to certain sticking points.

But the problem with creeds and confessions is that they tend to lord it over congregations and consciences. While people often quickly admit that these are fallible, susceptible to error, they are very often not willing or able to pinpoint just where the error lies.

Holy Thingism: "*That IT may save us*": 1 Samuel 4:3

"*And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said,*

"Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."" - **1 Samuel 4:3**

This is the beginning of a very sad chapter in the history of Israel. There could easily be a study in itself in this one verse, and a very rich sermon as well. But the reason this verse came to mind is the contrast of this particular verse with another one three chapters and thirty years later. But first, a little history in-between the two events:

Ichabod
The outcome of the above battle was not at all what the Israelites had hoped for. Bringing the Ark of the covenant did not help them at all: They lost the battle, many were killed, including Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli. Worst of all, they lost their Ark of the Covenant. The news of this killed the old father as soon as he heard of the disaster.

"*… he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck broke, and he died…*, **1 Sam. 4:18**"

Phinehas's wife gave birth at this very time. At one stroke there was the loss of husband, father-in-law, and the ark. This triple tragedy hastened her own death. Before she died she told her nurses to name her child "*Ichabod*", "*The glory has departed*".

A Lose-Lose Situation
But if this was such a tragic loss for the people of God it was not the victory that it seemed for the Philistines. They brought the Ark as a trophy to the temple of their god, Dagon. But God demonstrated his holiness to them by breaking the idol of Dagon:

"*Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the Ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold…*" [1], **1 Sam. 5:4**

More overwhelming than this largely symbolic judgment was the outbreak of the plague (perhaps bubonic, judging by **1 Sam. 6:4- 5**) among the Philistines. Wherever the ark went the plague followed; first Ashdod, then Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and, finally, Ekron. The men of Ekron demonstrated greater wisdom than those of Ashdod.

And of the Israelites in Shiloh, for that matter. Ekronites gathered all the Lords of the Philistines together and insisted, **1 Sam. 5:11**:

"*Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people!*"

Those priests and diviners knew that they could not send the ark back empty and insisted that it be sent back with "*five golden tumors and five golden rats*". In their limited way, and seemingly by divine

counsel, the Philistine priests had a higher perception of God's holiness than the hardened Israelites at the eve of the battle. Experience had taught them that God's presence brings judgment.

The Ark Returns to Israel. Israel Returns to God

To make a long story short, the ark is returned to the land of Israel, though not without additional disasters and painful lessons learned, 6:19- 21. After twenty years Samuel admonishes Israel:

"*If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreth (goddess images) from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.*"

And they did. And He did. But not before they had a serious scare.

Same Enemies, Different Response: "That HE May Save Us"

Samuel had called all of Israel to Mizpah [2], where he would pray for them, fast with them, and sacrifice on their behalf [3]. So, Samuel goes up to Mizpah. All of Israel goes up to Mizpah. And the Philistines go up to Mizpah!

Did the Philistines go up to Mizpah to repent of their idols? Not at all! They had heard of Israel's gathering together and, whether they sensed danger, or merely opportunity, they camped nearby in battle-readiness.

This distressed Israel greatly. History was repeating itself. This was very similar to **Samuel 4:3**. But this time their response shows true repentance from their idolatry and living faith in God. Seeing the Philistines camped nearby, they turn to their intercessor Samuel, and urgently request of him:

"*Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.*", **1 Sam. 7:8**

No appeal to the ark to be brought. Rescue must come from the living, but invisible, God, who awards naked faith with grace and victory.

Samuel, as priest, offered the unblemished lamb as a whole burnt offering to the Lord, and prayed to Him. And God granted the victory.

Holy Thingism Today

Israel had learned a valuable lesson to not trust to visible assurances of God's blessings, but to simply rely on His Name and on His promise. But this is not just ancient history. The sin Israel fell into here - and would again in just the next chapter - is a cautionary tale for us today as well. In many ways we seek to have the same visible assurances from God, asking not for Him, but for some "*it*".

For the Israelites the "*its*" have been the ark, a visible king (Saul), the brazen serpent ("*nehushtan*" - the brazen serpent, "*thing of brass*"), etc. But ours are different. Nonetheless, if anything serves to sever our faith in the living God and His Word, then it is idolatry just the same. Our forms of "*it*" can be the Lord's Supper, baptism, a church building or other "holy place", walking the aisle, etc.

Some of these can be useful and legitimate in their place. But none of these should take the place of true faith in Christ. If they do, then, they have become idols.

"*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*" **- 1 John 5:21**

Notes
1. The second broken neck in this account, the first being Eli's.

2. Why Mizpah? This is the place, centuries before, associated with Israel's previous putting away of idols, **Judges 10: 10- 17**. This may be why Mizpah was chosen by Samuel. The Jews found themselves in the same predicament, brought on by their idolatry.

3. Interesting note: Samuel is not from the house of Levi, but from Ephraim. Why is he sacrificing? The fact that he is able to minister as priest seems to prefigure another Priest who also is not of Levi, but of the tribe of Judah and the order of Melchizedek.

Founder of the Invincible, Invisible Jerusalem: Isaiah 52:13- 15; 54:1-3

This article is part of a series on the theme of the heavenly Jerusalem in the second half of Isaiah, chapters 40 through 66. Previous articles are found in my three previous books: "Off the Beaten Path", "We Seek a City", and "Earthly Images of Heavenly Truths". The articles are not in order. All of these books are available as free PDFs upon request via email: epitom4@gmail.com.

Now we come to the section of Isaiah that has no mention of Jerusalem or Zion at all. The next mentions of "*Zion*" being **Isa. 59:20** and **60:14**, the next "*Jerusalem*" occurs at **62:1**.

What are we to make of this? God sweeps aside the motifs of city and temple and reveals to us the real cause of our salvation, the astonishing mission, life and death of our Messiah. All of the types, prophecies, parables, and many of the historical incidents even, of the Old Testament point to our Christ Jesus. He is the foundation of the city, as well as it's light and life.

But it is as our sin-substitute that He has given us life. Who could have guessed that the Messiah was destined to die in such a horrible, shameful cursed way – death on a cross? Certainly prophets and even angels weren't able to understand this.

He is the one Foundation of the Heavenly City
Now here is a strange irony: God pronounced as abomination the act of killing the firstborn for the setting up of the city of Jericho. It was one of those abominations that brought judgment. *Yet God does this to His own Son*. The death of Christ is the foundation of the Heavenly Jerusalem. We are saved through His death.

The Greatest City in the World - has only one Door.
Christ is not only the foundation. He is also the door, the only door to the sheepfold. He said "*I am the door of the sheep*", **John 10:7**.

He was the Door that was open for all those first-century saints, left open for them as long as the "*day of salvation*" continued. As Christ and His apostles forewarned, however, there came a time when the door shut, both physically and spiritually.

He is the door for us today as well. For us there is still the need to "*press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*", **Phil. 3:14**.

Peter speaks of Christ as both Door and Foundation in **Acts 4:11- 12**:

"*This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone* [that is, "*foundation stone*"]. *Nor is there salvation in any other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*"

When God provided them their own Messiah that they professed to be waiting for, the unbelieving builders looked around for other building materials, like their enslaved ancient fathers in Egypt, seeking to add strawy chaff to their bricks.

It is with this same attitude that the majority of the Jews treated this Messianic portion of Isaiah: They ignored it. My version of the Torah has almost every other chapter of Isaiah – except this Messianic centerpiece and foundation of all the blessedness of the rest of the book! How strange, and how sad! Some Jewish works actually draw a black line around this passage, as well as Daniel 9, and proscribe the public reading of these two portions.

"*Behold My Servant shall deal prudently;*
He shall be exalted [or, "be lifted up"] *and be very high.*
Just as many were astonished at you,
So His appearance was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men;
So shall He sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;
For what had not been told them they shall see,
And what they had not heard they shall consider." **- Isaiah 52:13- 15**

The Widened Tent
This is the only part of the Messianic portion that I will quote, in order to keep on my main topic of the spiritual Jerusalem. Aside from the well known teaching of Christ's suffering, atoning death and resurrection, this whole section also teaches the miraculous growth of the church, the enlarging of the tent, **Isa. 54:2**, that proved to be such a stumbling-stone to the Jews.

The "*sprinkling of many nations*" teaches that God's care extends beyond the borders of Israel. This topic of the growth of the Kingdom is especially revisited in the last two chapters of Isaiah. Various writers see the sprinkling itself to refer primarily to Christ's blood, **1 Peter. 1:2**.

The kings shutting their mouths can be taken in a positive and a negative sense. First, there are bound to be some kings who will be won over to the Gospel, **Isaiah 49:7**. These will have no counter-arguments to the Message. Like Job's hearers they will put their hands to their mouths, **Job. 29:9**, the word being preached to them being the dew that gives spiritual growth, **Job. 29:22**; **Deut. 32:2**. These nations were not told and had not heard the Message – and yet God adds them now. These proved to be true sons of Abraham, and they took their place with all those Jews throughout the ages who are not just physical but also spiritual heirs of God's promise to Abraham.

Matthew Henry, commenting on this 54th chapter aptly observes that "t*he death of Christ is the life of the church*."

"*Sing. O barren,*
You who have not borne!
Break forth into singing, and cry aloud,
You who have not labored with child!
For more are the children of the desolate
Than the children of the married woman,' says the Lord.
"Enlarge the place of your tent,
And let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings;
Do not spare;
Lengthen your cords,
And strengthen your stakes.

For you shall expand to the right and to the left,
And your descendants will inherit the nations,
And make the desolate cities inhabited." **- Isaiah 54:1- 3**
God tore the most important curtain of the physical temple Himself, **Matt. 27:51**. He tore it like an outstanding bill finally paid. He tore it from top to bottom, making it clear that it was an act of God. And He abolished the Old Covenant in order to establish the New, **Heb. 10:9**:

"*He takes away the first, that He may establish the second*."

The spiritual, but real, temple grows in size and glory, just as Haggai said it would, **Hag. 2:6- 9.**

And who is the "*barren one*"? Fortunately, Paul quoted this very passage in **Gal. 4:27** and applies it to the children of promise, all those who are born of the Spirit, Jews and Gentiles.

These are the very ones who belong to Jerusalem above which is free, the mother of us all, **Gal. 4:26**.

There is only one eternal city, ever-growing whose "*Builder and Maker is God*". This is the city where we Christians have our citizenship.

Isaiah 64:1 and the Prayer that Brought the House Down

"Oh, that You would rend the heavens!
That You would come down!
That the mountains might shake at Your presence"

Unclear passages of the Old Testament are often clarified by later events and exposition. I had initially planned to write an article or two on Isaiah 63 and 64, but **this first verse of 64** jumped out at me, sparkling with possibilities. The more I studied it, those became more like certainties. It started with an interesting variation of this verse from the **Septuagint (LXX)**. More on that later below.

This whole passage is one continuous prayer for the people of God in the face of persecution and the seeming neglect of God. The "*Look down from heaven*" of **63:15** here changes to "*Oh, that you would rend the heavens*", **64:1**. This prayer, different in form, identical in intent, is made once again in **Rev. 6:10**:

"*and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who live on the earth?*""

It is unfortunate that **Isaiah 64:1** was arbitrarily made the head of a chapter, instead of a continuation of the previous verses. I**saiah 63:15 to the end of this 64th** chapter is one continuous prayer. It ought to be considered as one unit.

By the way, "*The heavens*" here should not be taken literally, any more than we should take the stars in Revelation falling from the sky literally. This is apocalyptic language. And, at least in this passage, "*heavens*" may in fact be a reference to the Holy Place of the Temple [1]. The burning of the Temple, after all, is in the context, **Isa. 64:11**:

"*Our holy and beautiful temple,*
Where our fathers praised You,
Is burned up with fire;
And all our pleasant things are laid waste."

With this in mind, the "*rending*" of this verse may refer to the veil of the Temple, the same one that was torn from top to bottom at the time of Calvary, **Matt 27:50-51** [2]. Interestingly, the LXX uses a different word here – "*anoixes*". The verse would then read:

"ἐὰν ἀνοίξῃς τὸν οὐρανόν" - "*If You would open the Heavens*".

Both renditions might be in view here. Was not the time of God's wrath displayed also the time of God's mercy revealed? The judgment on unbelieving Israel was also at the same time – and by the same event – an open door for the true remnant, Jews and Gentiles. The overused commonplace is, in this case, very appropriate: *When God closes one door He opens another*. Christ, Himself, is that Door, . The Kingdom of God was preached and, from that time onward to ours, the elect have been entering in.

But the door was closing for Old Covenant Israel, first signified by the tearing of the Temple veil, and finally with the destruction of the Temple itself [3]. A few years before this destruction there were, according to Josephus and others, several miraculous signs given [4]. One sign was the giant heavy brass door to the Holy Place opening of its own accord, requiring twenty men to close it again. See the account from Josephus in the footnote [5].

But there is a curious discrepancy between this account of Josephus and those of some other Jewish sources. Both the *Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds* relate that the closing of this door was a nightly recurring event *beginning in AD 30*. They, naturally, did not record another event that happened at the same time – the Crucifixion – but this connection strongly suggests a divine message. We have this from the Jerusalem Talmud:

"*Forty years before the destruction of the Temple,…. they would close the gates of the Temple by night and get up in the morning and find them wide open*" [6].

Interesting. The door opened daily seems very suggestive of the open invitation of the Gospel, the "*Now is the Day of Salvation*", **2 Cor. 6:2**. This "*day*" lasted for almost forty years.

The veil was also an emblematic invitation for those with eyes to see. "*The veil is taken away in Christ*", **2 Cor. 3:16**. Those whose hearts God has touched would not have missed the significance, although certain prominent Full Preterist authors continue to do so.

In a similar vein, the Babylonian Talmud writes:

"Our rabbis taught: During the last forty years before the destruction of the Temple …. the doors of the Hekel [Temple] *would open by themselves"* (Soncino version, Yoma 39b).

"Said Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakkai to the Temple, 'O Temple, why do you frighten us? We know that you will end up destroyed. For it has been said, 'Open your doors, O Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars'" **Zech.11:1**, Sota 6:3 [7].

The torn veil and open door portent are both pictures of **Heb. 10:20**. From that time on, those in Christ were entering in "*by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh*".

Notes:

1. For this possible interpretation see Josephus:

"When Moses distinguished the tabernacle into three parts, and allowed two of them to the priests, as a place accessible and common, he denoted the land and the sea, these being of general access to all; but he set apart the third division for God, because heaven is inaccessible to men." - J. AJ 3.179

https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0146%3Abook%3D3%3Asection%3D179

2. Some commentators suggest a possible connection with the rending of the garments, a common Jewish response of anger or mourning.

3. It might be objected that, since Isaiah wrote before the first destruction of the Temple, he necessarily had *that* destruction in mind. There certainly would be *some* reference to that first event but, as we can see from the continuing context all the way to the end of the book, the final end of the Jewish age is clearly the primary focus.

4. Josephus, J. BJ 6.5.3, records seven such signs:

1. A new star and comet was visible for a year
2. The light shining over the Temple altar
3. A "heifer" giving birth to a lamb in the Temple
4. The Temple door opening of its own accord
5. Armies seen in the skies
6. A voice heard announcing "*Let us depart from here*."
7. Jesus Ben Ananus proclaiming the imminent doom of Jerusalem

5. https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0148%3Abook%3D6%3Awhiston+chapter%3D5%3Awhiston+section%3D3

"Moreover, the eastern gate of the inner [court of the] *temple, which was of brass, and vastly heavy, and had been with difficulty shut by twenty men, and rested upon a basis armed with iron, and had bolts fastened very deep into the firm floor, which was there made of one entire stone, was seen to be opened of its own accord about the sixth hour of the night. Now those that kept watch in the temple came hereupon running to the captain of the temple, and told him of it; who then came up thither, and not without great difficulty was able to shut the gate again. This also appeared to the vulgar to be a very happy prodigy, as if God did thereby open them the gate of happiness. But the men of learning understood it, that the security of their holy house was dissolved of its own accord, and that the gate was opened for the advantage of their enemies. So these publicly declared that the signal foreshowed the desolation that was coming upon them."*

Josephus continues:
"*Besides these, a few days after that feast, on the one and twentieth day of the month Artemisius,* [Jyar,] *a certain prodigious and incredible phenomenon appeared."*

This begins the portent of the armies in the skies. I mention it here only to show that the doors opening were, according to Josephus, a few days before (the 21st day of the month of Artemisius.) Correlating this with other passages puts these events at AD 66.

6. Jacob Neusner, The Yerushalmi, p.156-157

7. https://www.minimannamoments.com/mystery-of-the-hekel/

Three Voices, Fulfilled AD 66: Isaiah 66:6

"A voice of noise from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of the LORD that renders recompense to his enemies."

666. A very easy mnemonic!

John Gill and **Adam Clarke** give the most plausible explanations for the first two voices, both conflating the three voices somewhat. But it seems very likely that each of these were answered by three separate subsequent events, the third being the fulfillment of **1 Thess. 4:16**:

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:"

Unfortunately, none of the commentaries I checked, their being for the most part futurists, connected that third voice with the actual Parousia.

Adam Clarke makes this observation:
"It is very remarkable that similar words were spoken by Jesus, son of Ananias, previously to the destruction of Jerusalem. See his very affecting history related by Josephus, War, B. vi., chap. v."

And this more lengthy comment is from John Gill:
"Some illustrate this by what the priests heard in the temple a little before the destruction of it, a rustling and a noise like persons shifting and moving, and a voice in the holy of holies, saying, "let us go hence"; as also the words of Jesus the son of Ananus, a countryman, who went about uttering these words,

"a voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and against the temple, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, a voice against all the people:" this he did before the war began, nor could he be persuaded to desist from it, but continued it afterwards; going on the walls of the city, saying,

"Woe, woe to the city, and to the temple, and to the people, woe to myself also;"

And while he was speaking the last words, a stone, cast from a Roman engine, killed him, as Josephus relates:

A voice of the Lord, that rendereth recompence to his enemies; for the Lord's voice was in all this, and his hand in the destruction of those people; it was according to his appointment, direction, and order, in righteous judgment for their sins, they being his implacable enemies, that would not have him to rule over them, Lu 19:14.

De Bello Jud. I. 6. c. 5. sect. 3."

It might be argued, since Isaiah wrote before the first destruction of Jerusalem, that **Isa. 66:6** would refer primarily to the Chaldean, not Roman, overthrow of the holy city. But the wider context definitely points to the final end of the Jewish Age, as can be seen by passages like **Isa. 66:3-4**:

“He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man;
He who sacrifices a lamb, as if he breaks a dog’s neck;
He who offers a grain offering, as if he offers swine’s blood;
He who burns incense, as if he blesses an idol.
Just as they have chosen their own ways,
And their soul delights in their abominations,

So will I choose their delusions,
And bring their fears on them;
Because, when I called, no one answered,
When I spoke they did not hear;
But they did evil before My eyes,
And chose that in which I do not delight.”

Since there were still several centuries after Isaiah’s time when sacrifices were still required under the Law, then the warnings in these verses above pertain to a time after this, to a time when the supreme sacrifice of the Son put an end to the necessity of all other sacrifices. These verse above were directed at those Jews who, knowing the message and ministry of Christ, stubbornly persist in their old ways. Their judgment is pronounced here. And the voices in Isaiah 66:6 are for their ears.

The New Covenant from an Old Testament Prophet

Hidden Gems from the Heart of the Book of Jeremiah

Misunderstood

"*Jeremiad*" is "*a tale of woe*" according to my dictionary and, likewise, Jeremiah himself is often thought of as the ever-complaining doom-saying prophet. And this is unfortunate because the message that this man of God has is one for today as well. This negative perception dissuades many from reading this book.

Yet if they would only read Jeremiah they might notice, near the middle of the book, an extended passage radiant with New Covenant Sonshine, describing life in the Son, our New Covenant in Christ. I am referring to **chapters 29 to 33**. These five chapters contain many promises of real comfort, although some of them are often grossly misapplied. I had put off writing about this passage because I never felt able to do it justice. But, then again, when can we do any part of God's Word justice?

Misapplied

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope." **- Jer. 29:11**

and

"Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you." **- Jer. 31:3**

The above verses have been subjected to at least two misinterpretations:

The *first* is to see the verses as exclusively referring to Israel, with not an ounce of application for saints today. But this is a minority view.

But the *second*, and worse, misapplication is to lift these respective verses entirely out of context, making them into glib – and dangerous – feelgood mantras for just anyone. This is even more dangerous than the first view, giving false hope to many who have no basis for it, and deceitfully extending a promise to some who have no spiritual capacity for it, nor real desire for its true application. I have heard several sermons, and seen not a few websites, which prominently feature these verses without any regard for the context. When I was a new Christian I bought a pretty red plastic box with Bible promises neatly printed inside. Both of those verses above were, of course, included. Just the verse. Neatly printed. Neatly ignoring respective contexts.

And what is the context here in Jeremiah? Primarily, but not wholly, Israel. Captivity in Babylon for seventy years. It must have seemed like the end of the world, similar to the way Christians felt centuries ago when Barbarians crashed the gates of the sacrosanct city of Rome. Likewise, the Jews felt the same about their revered city, Jerusalem.

The context? Read it yourself: **Jer. 29:4** reminds us to whom it was written "*to those carried away captive…to Babylon*". **Verse 5** tells them to build houses, plant gardens, marry, to carry on with life. They are there for the long haul. After other details are mentioned we get to **verse 10**, specifically mentioning seventy years of captivity for them and God's promise of bringing the captive Jews back to Jerusalem, "*return to this place*" (See also **v. 14**).

Now we get to the cherry-picker's **verse 11.** Notice the opening word "*For*". This links and limits this verse to the previous context. This is primarily a promise to Jewish believers. It amuses me that many of the same people who call all of the New Covenant Christians, Reformed Baptists, Calvinists "anti-Semitic", on the one hand, see no problems in wrestling this particular promise from ancient Jewish fingers in order to gloss it onto their own books, church websites, and seminar fliers.

To say this passage was solely for Israel, as I wrote above, would be a misapplication because it does have broader application to all believers. Some of the promises brought out in these chapters reach future-ward to the time of the Messiah (more on that below).

But they cannot be quite as universal in scope as many make them out to be. God's promises are only to the believers, being spoken only to those with ears to hear. It certainly doesn't apply to everyone. Where would have been Pharaoh's interest in this promise? Had God ever promised to give him "*a future and a hope"*? No, He pointedly raised him up in order to be glorified in his fall, Ex. 4:21; 11:9.

Everlasting Love

Chapter 30 ends with encouraging descriptions of God's planned future heart surgery on His own people. Comparing **verse 22** with **Ezekiel 36:26-28** shows that those who are "*His people*" (this phrase is in both places) will be given new hearts.

Both passages speak also of a rebuilt city and a rebuilt land. And we have to be careful here. Yes, some of the token proofs to these spiritual promises are indeed the physical beginnings of rebuilt Jerusalem. Yet it goes much farther than that. There is also – and more importantly – a spiritual building of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Zion of God.

This is the ultimate fulfillment that the Jerusalem Council came to recognize when news first came flooding in of all those Gentile converts in Galatia, Pisidia, and other areas. What were they to make of this unprecedented growth of their religion? They understood **Amos 9:11-12**, a passage similar to these in Jeremiah, as prophesying this very growth of the Kingdom of God, Japheth being enlarged, dwelling in the tents of Shem, **Gen.9:26-27**.

Chapters 30 – 33 of Jeremiah shed much light on just what the "*hope and a future*" entails. **Jer. 31:14** points to the physical return and rebuilding of Jerusalem. But then, in this same chapter, the focus changes to a spiritual Jerusalem (the church of redeemed Jews and Gentiles – us!). These middle chapters of Jeremiah are so worthy of more careful study because they have much to say about the New Covenant and the church.

If your faith is in Christ then you are also heavenly citizens of the New Jerusalem. The symbol of that city is shown in Revelation. The wonderful reality of this is already very much with us.

Read this wonderful book again, a book of ancient history and blessed eternal realities. With prayerful study you should find yourself in these pages, along with all of the family of God!

A Puzzle Piece Fell into Place: *Daniel 9:24-27*

Every once in a while some major piece of the Bible puzzle seems to come into place, and it is always exciting when it does. This is what had happened to me years ago with Daniel chapter 9. For a long time, although being clear on the sixfold Messianic fulfillment during the 1st century, and on the events of AD 70, what eluded me was the starting point of this prophetical time. I was led to unwarranted assumptions by a number of writers.

City, Not Temple

Most of these writers trained me to look in the wrong direction. The focus was on the temple, and just who gets credit for initiating the temple decree that supposedly started the countdown of the 70 weeks. Moreover, adding to the confusion, I hadn't stopped to really study the Daniel passage first of all. If I had I might have noticed that in Daniel 9:25 the emphasis is on the city, Jerusalem, not the temple.

Daniel 9:24-27, Timeline and Comments:

"**24.** *Seventy weeks are determined upon your people and upon your holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy*."

The seventy weeks come out to 490 years, "*seventy sevens*". This period of time is determined ("*cut off*"[1] for Daniel's people and the holy city. It is important to note that in this summary of the purpose of the seventy weeks there is *no mention of the temple*. The anointing of the "*Most Holy*" is a reference to the Person of Messiah, not the temple (More on this later).

"**25**. *Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times*."

Here we learn when the period starts; from the beginning of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. But whose command, **Cyrus** (536 BC), **Darius**, or **Artaxerxes** (454 BC)? In an earlier article [2] I demonstrated why Artaxerxes was the only likely candidate, and why **454 BC** is the date that fits. The "*troublous times*" (tribulation) is sufficiently attested to in the books of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** (and **Esther**, according to some). The builders of the holy city faced enemies both within and without; opposition, infiltration, accommodation, etc. Just like today for those who are part of the City of Zion.

This period totaling 69 weeks (483 years) brings us to AD 29, the very beginning of Messiah's ministry!

"**26**. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the Prince[3]that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined."

Notice, Christ is not cut off exactly at the end of the 69th week. We are only told that it is after it. More precise information comes in the following verse. What we do learn from this is that He will be cut off not for His own sins ("*not for Himself*"). And, once again, in the last part of the verse we have subsequent events foretold that are not fixed in relation to the end of this period, only that they come afterward. But all of these events are "*determined*", just as the duration of the 490 years is "*determined*".

"**27**. *And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate*."

This is one of the most misinterpreted prophetical verses in the Bible, the error being helped along by many modern translators who, by using distinguishing lowercase, or by footnotes, identify this confirmer and "*breaker*" of the covenant to be Antichrist."

This passage is purely Messianic.
He is the Confirmer of the Covenant, "*This is the New Covenant in my blood*".
He causes the sacrifices to cease by His own righteous and God-satisfying once-for-all offering. When He said "*It is finished*" it was finished.

Since this article is mostly about the timing of the 490 years I will just keep myself to this summary of the other verses for now. For more detail see my article "Six Promises of Christ for His People"

Is this Passage About a 490 Year Period, or Something Totally Different?
First, a certain credibility issue for the prophecy as a whole needs to be dealt with. The interpretation has been raised that this prophecy has nothing to do with a fixed time period, or that 490 years, at least are not precisely meant, but rather an indefinite period. The best way to answer this is to consider the context. This very chapter begins with Daniel

"*understanding by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem*".

Jeremiah had written about the length of this captivity in **Jer. 25:9-12**. Was this a definite period? Of course it was.

Now why did Daniel just at that time begin to understand, to have a burden and to pray for his people? I believe it was partly from having just witnessed the Medes overcome the Chaldeans. Having read Isaiah's prophecies, **Isaiah 44:24-28:2**, and putting together Jeremiah's passage with that, he would have recognized Cyrus and the Medes as divinely appointed instruments of delivery. The appearance of Cyrus, after all, was prophesied by actual name, long before he ever existed.

Also Daniel's recent harrowing adventure with Belshazzar on that last night of the Chaldean Empire was bound to have come to mind as he read Jeremiah 25. That very passage that speaks of seventy actual years of captivity in Babylon -*or do we spiritualize these too*? - then goes on to describe delivery from Babylon. Notice the details: After seventy years

"*I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation*", - **v. 12.**

God had said, moreover, to Jeremiah to take the wine cup from His hand and give it to the nations and make them drink, **vs. 15- 17**. This was typified by Belshazzar at his wine party. He thought he was just drinking from Jewish cups, but He was actually drinking from the wine of God.

Daniel actually witnessed all this in very recent memory. So as all these pieces came together he knew that surely the time for, not only the Jew's release, but their return to the land must be at hand. This motivated him to pray.

A Question of Timing

An added perplexity and a further motivation to prayer was the puzzle of timing: When did the 70 years start? After all, there were three separate deportation events after the Fall of Jerusalem, **2 Kings 24:14; 25:11.** See also **2 Chron. 36:20 and Jer. 52:28-30**.

Then Gabriel visited him with his answer and consolation. Now what kind of consolation would it have been to Daniel and for his people if the promised deliverance was not in definite years? They had suffered real shame and affliction, deserved though it was, for a definite period. Should not the consolation also be definite? Yes, much of what is promised is spiritual, but relief from this predicament has to also be physical, since that is the world we live in.

Artaxerxes I and the Only Decree that Fits

Artaxerxes the first is also called **Longimanus**, for supposedly having hands that touch his knees when he stands erect! (according to Adam Clarke. But Ussher maintains that he had one hand longer than the other.) But more importantly he was the one who issued the decree for those returning to the land to restore and rebuild the holy city.

Why then do so many Christian books make such a fanfare of the decree of Cyrus, as if he is the only one who could have fulfilled this? Honestly, I just don't know, other than to say that no other options were being taught. Because if you read Cyrus's proclamation, and then read **Daniel 9:25** (see above), you should know that this can't have been the decree spoken of. There was no mention of the temple. And Cyrus's edict is all about building the temple.

The second two decrees that are seriously considered are both from the same man, Artaxerxes Longimanus. the last one, the one we speaking of, being in 454 BC. This is the one that fits the chronology and the parameters.

Here is the point where we should be somewhat wary of the surmises by people like **Sir Robert Anderson** who, out of doctrinal presupposition and, thus, mathematical constraint, converts Jewish years into 360 days each in order to have the near-endpoint of the prophecy, the 69th week, end up in the years of Christ's incarnate life. He used incredible means to arrive at a credible endpoint! (As if the Jews of the day did not already have their intercalary corrections. Once again, this is fallacious: Were the seventy years of captivity based on 360 days (Seventy years of 360 days each)? No, of course not. Neither are these 490 years.

In studying puzzling Scripture we sometimes discover that the difficulty is not from the Scripture, but from the fallible side columns, footnotes, glosses, and books from authors who did not truly honor the sacred text.

NOTES

1. I am especially indebted to Kim Riddlebarger for cluing me in on the pervasive covenant terminology used in our passage. "*Determined*" translates the Hebrew term which is the same root used to describe "*cut a covenant*". However I don't see all the supposed covenantal details that Riddlebarger sees in other parts of the Old Testament. Neither do I make the eschatological connections he makes.

2. See the article "**Old Greek History & Daniel's Seventy Weeks**:*Themistocles Meets Artaxerxes, 473 BC: An Old Greek Admiral Meets a Young Persian King". This is in my book "Earthly Images of Heavenly Truths".* Available upon request as a free PDF. My email: epitom4@gmail.com.

3. The version which I quoted left "*prince*" uncapitalized, as if it was not the Prince of the verse just previous. But this is unwarranted, as I have explained at length in another article,. "**Six Promises of Christ to His People and City**". This is in my earlier book, "*Off the Beaten Path*", also available upon request as a free PDF.

Hugh Ross. His "Good News" brings Bad Fruit

A closer look at Dual Revelation

Although this article addresses the teaching of **Hugh Ross** much of the argument here applies to other teachers with similar beliefs. **Tim Martin and JL Vaughn** ("*Beyond Creation Science*") display the same careless treatment of Scripture's creation account. In fact, when I had first written articles against Ross , Vaughn took me to task for attacking his work as well.

Many Christians more or less believe several of the tenets of Ross's teachings: They either believe in a framework hypothesis or in some variant - yet all the while holding (inconsistently) to a high regard to Scripture. By contrast, Hugh Ross holds a low regard for Scripture, several times either adding words to it or placing nature on a par with it, calling it the 67th book of the Bible. I write all of this to point out that, while I strongly disagree with all forms of theistic evolution (what I see as compromise) my main point of this article is against those who *teach against the all-sufficiency of the Bible*. This is exactly what Hugh Ross does.

I have found that many already have an enthusiastic commitment to this evangelistic approach to sharing the truth about God. Who does not want to be effective in reaching the lost? Or to give them reasons to believe in the God who loved them so much that He sent His Son to pay the price for our sin? I hope that you will read this in its entirety in the spirit of **Acts 17:11**.

Revelation or Revelations?

Ross has a real problem with what he calls the "*single revelational view*", a doctrine that until now did not need a name since it was held by orthodox Christianity for centuries. We will show that the inspired Biblical writers held this "*view*" as well. They also do not leave any room for any other source of revelation. Ross's "*dual revelation*" is extremely problematic and can lead to another Gospel. First, we quote Ross from his Reasons to Believe website and then two snippets from his Teccoa Falls Lecture (Georgia, March 1997) This quote is quite old but is still descriptive of his current position, as can be seen from his site:

"Modern day advocates of Gosse's view all hold to what is called a single revelational view - the belief that the Bible is the only authoritative source of truth. In other words, we must grope in darkness apart from God's special revelation in scripture." No tampering with the "literal" meaning of the Bible can be tolerated.

"Single revelational theology, however, in itself contradicts the "plain meaning of the Bible." According to Psalm 19:1-4, the "words" of God proclaimed through the stars and galaxies have been heard by all people. In Romans 1:19-20 the Bible declares that everyone is "without excuse" as he or she faces God's eternal judgment [including those people who have never read the Bible or heard the preaching

of believers] since what may be known about God has been made plain to all through what has been made.

Colossians 1:23 points out that the plan of salvation "has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven." "

Phillip Gosse is a 19th century scientist/preacher who favored "*discoveries*" of his day over what he should have known from Scripture. For Him the resolution of the conflict between the Old-Earth evidence (sic) and faithfulness to the Bible was the compromise that God created the geological data with an appearance of age. Almost all Young Earth believers dismiss Gosse's aspersion on the truthfulness of God. The "appearance of age" is actually an "assumption of age" misread into the evidence. This deception is not part of God's plan, rather it is the baggage of the faulty assumption of uniformitarian Old-Earth evolutionists and undiscerning Christian concessionists.

Ross Defines and Defends Dual Revelation

Hugh Ross actually teaches that Nature (that is, science's interpretation of nature) is equivalent to the 67th book of the Bible. Nature and the Bible are on a par with each other in testifying of the existence, attributes and purposes of God. The following quotes clarify his position:

"The plan of salvation as stated in the Bible can be seen through observation of the universe about us,..."

"The record of nature ... actually encompasses part of the Word of God."

"And the Bible tells us it's impossible for God to lie, so the record of nature must be just as perfect, and

reliable and truthful as the sixty-six books of the Bible that is part of the Word of God.. .And so when astronomers tell us [Ross uses the example of scientists attempting to measure distances in space and goes on to say that] <u>it's part of the truth that God has revealed to us. It actually encompasses part of the Word of God.</u>" - Toccoa Falls Christian College, Staley Lecture Series, March 1997

I need to add that this notion of nature being a book of the Bible is not new with Hugh Ross. Unfortunately, CH Spurgeon, in an unguarded instance of being more clever than correct, also spoke of the visible creation as an additional book of the Bible. But he, of course, did not take this notion to the extremes that Ross does.

The Bible our only Authoritative Source of Truth?

In a word, Yes. The Bible *is* the only authoritative source of God's truth. Let's examine the first passage that Ross cites (Psalm 19) and see if he has been fair to the Word of God on this point or if he is indeed quoting the verses out of context. Read the whole Psalm, however, not stopping where Ross does. You may find a different truth unfolding. Then we will call on another authority who should settle the matter.

Psalm 19:
1. The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
2. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.
3. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.
4. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens he has pitched a tent for the sun,

This is where Ross stops. Usually he stops, in fact, in the middle of verse 4. And as such we have a pretty good cross-reference to **Romans 1:19**, one that he rightly mentions. But the purpose of this Psalm is not discerned by stopping here. The latter verses are not mere commentary or elaboration of the first part of the Psalm. Rather they constitute a contrast, a progression to something better.

5. which is like a bridegroom coming forth from his pavilion, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
6. It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is hidden from its heat.

This is the limit of the "voice of nature".

7. The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
8. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
9. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.
10. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.
11. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
12. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
13. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.
14. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Do you see the contrast?
The Word of God is shown to be more effective than the mere declaration of the heavens. God might get our attention with His works in creation, but it is the Word of God that "*revives the soul*". It not only reveals God in a personal way that creation cannot, it probes into our very defenses "*and is a discerner of the thought and intents*" of our heart, **Heb. 4:12**. It is this very probing that makes the Psalmist cry out "*Forgive my hidden faults.*" They were hidden, but God's Word found them out. Jesus told His followers, "*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.*", **John 6:63**. It is this same Holy Spirit who came to the world to "*convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment*.", **John 16: 8**. Jesus spoke about the enemies of

the truth that, though they had seen and heard all the "*revelation*" that creation afforded, **Psalm 19:1-4, Rom. 1:19**, yet their real guilt only started when Christ came personally and spoke with them personally and they still did not believe:

"If I had not come and spoken to them. they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin.", **John 15:22**

Yet according to Hugh Ross's dual revelation, they no longer have excuse for their sin when they first are able to see the "*67th book of the Bible*", the visible works of creation. Who do you believe, Jesus or Ross?

Here are other verses, aside from the ones already quoted, that prove that there is only one source of revelation of God, and that is His Word as revealed in the Bible:

"*God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: has he said, and shall he not do it? or has he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*" **- Numbers 23:19**

What promises of God can you read from nature and prove this verse for yourself? His promises are in His written Word, not written in the skies!

"Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and al that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls." **- James 1:21**

Is there anything in Ross's 67th book that God speaks of this way, that can "save our souls"? Of course not. God's Word is God's way to save us.

The Apostle Peter, after recounting his experience at the Transfiguration, yet gives greater importance to God's Word than to his experience:

"*We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day star arise in your hearts.*" **- 2nd Peter 1:19-21**

When the teaching of Jesus was getting too pointed for many of His "*believers*", when He started talking about "*eating my flesh*" and "*drinking my blood*", many left Him. He asked Peter if he would go away too. Peter answered,

"*To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life*.", **John 6:68**. He knew that there was no other source of "*words of eternal life*".

Just How Many Ways to God are There?

The Bible is clear as to how to be saved. "*He that comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him*", **Heb. 11:6.** But how can that person believe? By looking at nature, or maybe by reading Scientific American? No. "*Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God"*, **Rom. 10:17.**

But I have heard some misapply **Psalm 19** at this point, as if to say that, yes, faith comes by hearing but that hearing can be of the glory of God's expansive creation, **Psa 19:1-2**. However, a simple reading of the **Rom. 10:17** in context clears this up. **Psalms 19** is quoted by Paul here. Nature, Paul teaches here and in **chapter 1**, is sufficient to show the existence of God and thus our obligation to be right with Him. It is *not* sufficient to show us God's attributes (except His power, and that only partly) nor His way of Salvation which is through the Work of Christ taught by the Word of God .

Bottom line: If there are no "Gospel feet", **Rom 10:15,** there is no hearing, **vs. 14.**
If there is no hearing, there is no faith, **vs. 17.**

Contrast this again with Ross's:

"The plan of salvation as stated in the Bible can be seen through observation of the universe about us,..."

"the record of nature...actually encompasses part of the Word of God."

Ross's Extreme Error of Another Way to God

I am truly concerned for any of his converts if they have seen God in the stars *but have never been to the Cross*. The Cross is what humbles us because it is the foolishness of the message that kills us.

"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through Me." You either go through the door (the Cross) or you are still in your sins.

Ross's sheepfold has 2 doors:

Door 1, Christ - or if you prefer, Door 2, Nature (as interpreted by "*Science*"). By the way, any reference to "*science*" ("*knowledge*") without God needs to have quotation marks, because fallen men using biased, imperfect investigative procedures will never show anyone the way out of their own darkness, let alone to the immortal, invisible God that saves.

"Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom." - **Psa. 145:3**

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" - **Rom. 11:33**

Ross's Christless Creation

In an address at Dallas Theological Seminary Ross stated:

'Therefore it allows me to make an interesting paraphrase of John 3:16, if you'll permit—'For God so loved the human race that He went to the expense of building a hundred billion trillion stars and carefully shaped and crafted them for sixteen billion years so that at this brief moment in time we could all have a nice place to live."

Obviously, Hugh Ross adds quite a bit of his own wishful eisegesis into this verse, but what is most striking is what he leaves out, And Who he leaves out. No mention of " *believe*", "*not perishing*" or "*Son*", let alone "*Only-begotten Son*". And, in place of "*eternal life*", he offers "*a nice place to live*".

It is surprising that so many seemingly solid Christians should actually find in Hugh Ross reasons to believe.

Note

Here is CH Spurgeon's quote:

"Better have two lights than only one. The light of creation is a bright light. God may be seen in the stars; his name is written in gilt letters on the brow of night; you may discover his glory in the ocean waves, yea, in the trees of the field; but it is better to read it in two books than in one. You will find it here more clearly revealed, for he has written this book himself, and he has given you the key to understand it, if you have the Holy Spirit. Ah, beloved, let us thank God for this Bible; let us love it; let us count it more precious than much fine gold." - **New Park Street Pulpit, Volume 1,** Sermon on Hosea 8:12 given March 18, 1885 : Hosea 8:12

The Other Martin of the German Reformation: Martin Bucer

I had a friend who wondered about my interest in Reformed "*dead guys*". There are some who are not only dead but forgotten. And that is our loss, because they made significant contributions to the spiritual Renaissance that was the Reformation. Some of the men who come to mind are **Martin Bucer**, **David Pareus** and **Matthius Flaccius**.

Bucer, the other "Martin" of the German Reformation, was right there with **Luther**, **Zwingli** and **Melanchthon** through most of those frenzied early decades of the continental Reformation. He was at times befriended, at other times distrusted, by the more famous Martin. His problem was that he wanted the various factions of the Reformers to be unified in the face of threefold opposition: Secular State, fellow Reformers, and Rome.

Here is a quote from the *Britannica Encyclopaedia* on this event:

"In the various colloquies between Protestants and Catholics or between German Lutheran and Swiss Reform churchmen, Bucer often advocated the use of obscure language and ambiguous formulas when explicit agreement between the opposing parties was impossible to attain. His justification for the use of ambiguity was that he believed that the essential goal was the reform of the people and the doctrinal issues could be worked out later."

Another demonstration of Bucer's pragmatism was when he (along with Melanchthon and Luther!) assured their local leader, **Philip the Confessor**, that he could have a second wife! And citing the Old Testament as precedent! But he later repented of this.

Where Bucer really shines is in his carrying over his work into England, having been banished from Strasburg (along with his partner, **Paul Fagius**) for not acceding to the compromise of 1548 with Roman Catholics (It was officially called the "*Augsburg Interim*", but the name is not the thing).

It was in England that **Edward VI,** young heir of **Henry VIII**, eager to put God's truth into action, asked him for help in carrying along true Reformed principles in the kingdom newly entrusted to him. The last, best labor that Bucer brought out for this young king was his "*De Regno Christi*" ("*The Kingdom of Christ*"). Shortly afterward he died. Bucer's fellow-fugitive, Fagius, also died about this same time (of the plague, I believe). Unfortunately Edward died also, very soon afterwards. He died young, being replaced (after a tragic interim) with the "**Bloody Mary**", who promptly disinterred the bones of both Bucer and Fagius.

God's purposes and working are truly beyond our understanding. Here was the opportunity for the German Reformation to bear wonderful fruit in England. But instead – after just a couple of years – all of these, the advisors and the regal advisee – died. And along comes Mary!

As far as Bucer's writings is concerned, Britannica tells us "*The definitive edition of the collected works of Bucer is now in progress*".

Martin Bucer, like all of the Reformers, was certainly a product of his times. His life is both exemplary and cautionary. The latter especially in his willingness to, as Britannica wrote, put "*the reform of the people*" over "*doctrinal issues*". But those doctrinal issues are the very foundation of the people of God. Martin Bucer seemed quite willing to place people over doctrine. Doing this very often leads to a people with no doctrine, because once one is determined to sacrifice lesser doctrines it becomes harder to justify or even *discern* the line that safeguards the essentials.

Christologia Review, 1: John Owen's Examination of Christ, "The Son of the Living God"

History: This work was first published in 1679, a year after the publication of his close friend **John Bunyan's** more famous "*Pilgrim's Progress*". Owen wrote his work because, based on his knowledge of church history and current trends, he felt that Christianity was heading for a down-slide, and that doctrinal disaster on a large scale was only years away. The only antidote to this watering down of Gospel truths was a consistent, determined study and preaching of the grace of God in Christ, and the sheer gratuity of justification based on the merits of the well-beloved Son. Semi-quoting the editor, "Christ must be enthroned anew on the hearts and consciences of men".

Owen's misgivings would prove prophetic. Before the century was out sophisticated attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity and on the nature of Christ appeared. Amid the now-obscure names we find two familiar ones: **William Whiston**, translator and editor of a popular edition of **Josephus**, and **Isaac Watts**, writer of familiar hymns ("*O God, our help in ages past*", "*When I survey the wondrous cross*"). Whiston showed himself a determined advocate against the deity of Christ. Isaac Watts, taking over the leadership of Owen's own church, taught that (quoting the editor), "*the Father is so united to the man Christ Jesus , whose human soul preexisted his coming in the flesh, that, through this indwelling of the Godhead, he became properly God.*" (!) These are, of course, quite contrary to this very book that Owen wrote a quarter century before.

The book itself: The title, "*Christologia*", sounds rather dry to some, but that is far from the actual contents. This is not a obtuse, philosophical "*How many angels on the head of a pin?*" exercise. It is quite practical. The purpose of this work is to "*illustrate the mystery of divine grace in the person of Christ*", pursuing this goal by first examining **Matthew 16:16**:

"*And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*"

Christ gives a twofold response: Praising the faith of Peter and then revealing the nature and scope of the confession. This closer examination of Christ takes up most of the first chapter.

Here is a sketchy summary of the editor's overview of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2: Historical accounts of attacks against the teaching of **Matthew 16:16**. (Many of these are being repeated today, with only slight variation).

Chapters 3 through 7: All true religion comes through Christ. He is also the embodiment of God's will and truth; the source of God's edifying grace for the church.

Chapter 8: This grace, and faith in it, was already operative (though in different manner) in the Old Testament Church.

Chapter 9 through 15 exalts the honor and obedience that is due to Christ, our need for Christlikeness.

Chapters 16 through 17 shows how the wisdom of God dwells in Christ, along with practical uses of this truth. For that matter, the whole work is geared toward *assimilation*, *meditation* and practical *perspiration*. OK, I admit that he doesn't *quite* put it that way, but you know what I mean!

Chapter 18 explains the hypostatical union. Some ramifications of this union I had never heard of. As a preterist, there are some areas of this chapter that I might phrase differently.

Chapters 19 and 20 end the book with an examination on Christ's exaltation and His priestly mediation in Heaven.

Those who wish to find a book that builds on this one will find it in Owen's "*Meditations on the Glory of Christ*", a continuation of the studies of "*Christologia*".

In common with all Reformed writers, some of John Owen’s theology does not agree with our Preterist understanding of Scripture, but much can be learned from his works.

Christologia Review, 2: To Know Him is life eternal!

After saying we need to know God, in His character and attributes, and His representation in Christ, **John 17:3**, Owen continues that this is the very foundation and life of our faith:

"In these things consist the soul, life, power, beauty, and efficacy of the Christian religion; without which, whatever outward ornaments may be put upon its exercise, it is but a useless, lifeless carcass. The whole of this design is expressed in these heavenly words of the apostle: (Philippians 3:8-12:)"

Christ will either be our rock of salvation or *He will be the stone that grinds us to powder*. Our life of responsiveness to Him will determine (that is, make apparent) which side of God's election we are on.

Owen's Preface to his work
In his preface Owen also outlines his work, chapter by chapter. Because he writes of things in this preface that are only found here (and not in the chapters themselves) it might be good to take a look at some of these points, many of which are *unheard of* to modern Christians.

In **chapter 1** Owen cuts through the "*pretended ambiguity*" of the "*on this rock*" of **Matthew 16:18**, showing by quotes from the early church writers (**Ignatius, Epiphanius, Augustine**, etc.) that "*this rock*" is *The* Rock, Christ. Not Peter (as proto-Pope), not even Peter's *confession*. Owen concludes:

"Those holy men of old unto whom Christ was precious, being untainted with the desires of secular grandeur and power, knew nothing ... [of the] Pope of Rome be[ing] the rock whereon the church is built ."

The best quotation, in my view, is the last one from Augustine:
"He (Christ) meant the universal church, which in this world is shaken with divers temptations, as with showers, floods, and tempests, yet falleth not, because it is built on the rock (Petra) from whence Peter took his name. For the rock is not called Petra from Peter, but Peter is so called from Petra the rock; as Christ is not so called from Christian, but Christian from Christ. Therefore, said the Lord, 'Upon this rock will I build my church;' because Peter said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Upon this rock, which thou hast confessed, will I build my church. For Christ himself was the rock on which foundation Peter himself was built. For other foundation can no man lay, save that which is laid which is Jesus Christ."

Church Councils *Unscriptural*?

Now in this **second** chapter we come to what some would call a *bizarre interpretation* of church history; the charge that using Councils of the Church was an unscriptural method in dealing with error in the church, that God had already laid out the means and the equipment for the defending of His church from the gates of hell. And, once again, there is much in Owen's outline of his chapter that is not in the chapter itself. An English teacher would certainly take off points here as far as style is concerned! You are not supposed to go off on a tangent in the very introduction to your thesis! But who cares about strict style? This is great stuff to think about. Here is a lengthy quote from the iconoclast himself:

"The defense of the truth, from the beginning, was left in charge unto, and managed by, the guides and rulers of the church in their several capacities. And by the Scripture it was that they discharged their duty confirmed with apostolical tradition consonant thereunto. This was left in charge unto them by the great apostle, (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 6:13, 14; 2 Timothy 2:1, 2, 15, 23, 24; 4:1-5,) and wherein any of them failed in this duty, they were reproved by Christ himself: Revelation 2:14, 15, 20. Nor were private believers (in their places and capacities) either unable for this duty or exempt from it, but discharged themselves faithfully therein, according unto commandment given unto them: 1 John 2:20, 27; 4:1-3; 2 John 1:8, 9. All true believers, in their several stations - by mutual watchfullness, preaching, or writing, according unto their calls and abilities - effectually used the outward means for the preservation and propagation of the faith of the church."

We should be able to defend the truth given to us by using the gifts that God gave us for that very purpose. These passages speak for themselves. The ones in Timothy seem especially to the point. The councils that were called to fight, say, Arianism were seriously flawed in methodology. What glory is it to God when a Constantine is able to have a degree of control in the debate? And any church history book can demonstrate what heresies have consequently been birthed in a well-meaning attempt to combat previous heresies.

"***Beware, in fighting the dragon, that you do not become the dragon!***"

Nietzsche wrote this. More to the point is this:

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds", **2 Cor. 10:4**.

When we have to pull down something (an old stump of paganism, for instance) we should reach for, not a 2-by-4, but a 10-by-4, **2 Cor. 10:4**! That way God, in this as well as everything else praiseworthy, gets all the glory!

Christologia Review, 3: "You are the Christ, the Son of The Living God":

The Confession that is Good for our Souls

The starting and sticking point of Owen's "*Christologia*" is **Matthew 16:16:**

"And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The passage continues:

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This short confession of Peter's, Owen points out, *"comprises eminently the whole truth concerning the person and office of Christ"*. He was the Son of Man, but He was also at the same time, in His unchanging nature, "t*he eternal Son of the living God*" and, in His office, the Christ. God sent and anointed Him to save the church, being for their sake *Prophet, Priest and King.*

Peter's confession should be our confession. In fact, the same foundational confessions occur elsewhere, as we see in **Romans 10:9** and **1st John 4:2-3**:

"If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved"

"Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit who confesses not that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God."

This foundational confession concerning Christ is more important than is generally recognized, especially today. All the divine truths in Scripture are linked together and founded on Christ's person and work. God will not "*work around*" those who do not confess Christ as He really is, or who will not correctly acknowledge His saving work accomplished in the days of His flesh. And (Owen writes) these things *"are virtually comprised in this confession"*.

This passage is then very important to our faith. It stands to reason, also, that it would be the focal point of much worldly antipathy and adversity.

This passage has been the cause of much misunderstanding and bad teaching. It has also been the refuge for bad theology.

The Roman Catholic **Baronius** is an example of this. He (in common with most Catholics today) insists that this whole incident gives Scriptural mandate for the calling of church councils, in order to determine spiritual truth, and for the elevation of Peter (as the first of the Popes). But Baronius, and those many who follow his thinking, miss the point: How could this be the example of a council, and of a supposed "*vicar of Christ*" - when Christ Himself is still present with them? Owen writes,

"[T]hat he should also have a substitute while he was present, is somewhat uncouth; and whilst they live, they shall never make the pope president where Christ is present."

The whole purpose for Christ's asking Peter and the others who *they thought he was* was, not to ascertain the truth (as councils do) but to *delve into the hearts of His disciples, to disclose their God-given faith.*

Besides the particular error of the Roman Catholics on this passage, there is a more general, but no less fatal, mistake that many make concerning Bible truth in general; and that is to so strongly hold onto certain misconceptions so as not to allow the light of the Word enter in. Owen warns:

"The dangers of men's souls lies not in an inability to attain a comprehension of longer or more subtle [difficult] *confessions of faith, but in embracing things contrary to, or inconsistent with this foundation [of Christ].* ***Whatever it be whereby men cease to hold the Head, how small soever it seem, that alone is pernicious: Col. 2:18- 19."***

So when a person teaches an incomplete atonement at Calvary or a redemption that was not achieved by the blood of Christ – both of which Don Preston and many others of the Corporate Eschatology sect of Preterism insist upon – they are no longer connected to the Head, no longer having a vital interest in the life that comes from the Springs of Living Water. Or (in the case of some) they never had it.

Beware of Blockers

Many hold beliefs that act as enzyme-blockers to the Truth. They hold certain notions about Christ - and thus about salvation - that take the power right out of this confession!

So much for confessions negatively considered. On the positive side Owen draws our attention to two necessary aspects of Peter's confession:

1. The faith of the one confessing,
2. The nature of the faith being verbally confessed.

Both are gifts of God, indications of His gracious working. The second, of course, is the necessary testimony to the world of what would otherwise be merely a private faith, making no impact on the world.

Owen continues to give Peter's confession, and Christ's response, the proper significance. The rock upon which the church is built is not Peter, nor is it his confession, but Christ Himself. Although there would arise from the misuse of this passage a pernicious and powerful entity, the original intent of Christ is that the Church will always - must always - be built upon Christ, "*living stones*" upon the "*Rock*".

And the *abusers* of this passage? "*But their rock is not as our rock, themselves being judges;*" **Psalm 115:8.**

Owen here points primarily to the Roman Catholic Church as the mishandlers of this promise, but it seems certain that he is being more specific in his application than is warranted. The primary

application, and the implied warning that Christ gives in the context, is directed to *those Jews of that generation*, the very ones He elsewhere had forewarned. It was upon *this* generation that all the sins and apostasies of previous generations would be inexorably revisited, **Matt. 23:35**.

Over these last few years I keep coming back to the studies of John Owen, though I have come to disagree with some of his beliefs. Here is a man who clearly loved God's Word. His study is always suggestive of further studies, being like the faithful scribe of the Kingdom who

"*brings out of his treasure things new and old*" - **Matt. 13:52**.

In that sense he is not only a top-rank expositional writer, as can be seen from his Commentary on Hebrews. But he is also more truly devotional than many *supposed devotional writers today*.

Christologia Review, 4: The Nature of Christ, Incarnation & the Trinity: Blessed Truths to Handle Reverently

Chapter 3: The person of Christ is the foundation on which the church is built and has its strength. And this is where the opposition against the church aims its weapons; on who Christ is. By the way, only a small part of this opposition is from those who actually deny the deity of Christ. The greatest part of our enemies - and the more subtle - are those that intend to hinder Christ from being God for us. One way or other they obscure from our sight the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

John Owen teaches that Christ is the Son, not by "*voluntary contrivance*" or plan of the Father, but by actual nature. Moreover He is the Son from eternity. This is clearly taught in Scripture.

Speaking of which, our writer also cautions us on the distinction between searching out truth from God's revealed Word, on the one hand, and that heartless head-knowledge which seeks (and pretends to find) answers to mysteries that we are not to know about. It is one thing to believe in the eternal generation of the Son, and to draw Bible-instructed application. It is another to build entire theories out of this, trying to answer, for instance, how the Son can be eternally generated. Well, its not our business to know this. These dry speculations are the breeding grounds of cults. They lead away from simply drawing upon what God has instructed us in the Bible. Some good quotes to this effect are:

"I inquire of you when and how the Son was begotten? Impossible it is to me to know the mystery of this generation. My mind fails, my voice is silent - and not only mine, but of the angels; it is above principalities, above angels, above the cherubim, above the seraphim, above all understanding. Lay your hand on your mouth; it is not lawful to search into these heavenly mysteries. It is lawful to know that he was born - it is not lawful to discuss how he was born; that it is not lawful for me to deny - this I am afraid to inquire into." - **Ambrose**, "De Fide, ad Gratianum

Ephraim Syrus also wrote along these lines:

"He is unhappy, miserable, and most impudent, who desires to examine or search out his Maker. Thousands of thousands, and hundreds of thousands of millions of angels and archangels, do glorify him with dread, and adore him with trembling; and shall men of clay, full of sins, dispute of the Deity without fear? Horror does not shake their bodies, their minds do not tremble, but being secure and pealing [i.e., loudly proclaiming] *, they speak of the Son of God, who suffered for me, unworthy sinner, and of both his nativities or generations; at least they're not sensible how blind they are in the light."*

The Incarnation: A related, but distinct, teaching that is worthy and necessary to examine. But it is very easy to err either way; either to imagine a Christ so human that his deity is in doubt, or a Jesus so divine that His connection with humanity is severed. **Leo**, in his ninth sermon on the nativity, wrote:

"Some of the ancients, I confess, speak freely of the composition of the person of Christ in and by the two natures, the divine and human. That the Son of God after his incarnation had one nature, composed of the Deity and humanity, was the heresy of Apollinarius, Eutyches, the Monothelites, or Monophysites, condemned by all. But that his most simple divine nature, and the human, composed properly of soul and body, did compose his one person, or that it was composed of them, they constantly affirmed."

Though **Leo** wrote in a time when the church was already well-advanced toward the Roman Catholic Church ("*catholic*" becoming "*Catholic*"), with he himself being one of its pillars, yet he also managed to teach some insightful truths:

"Human nature is assumed into the society of the Creator, not that he should be the inhabitant, and that the habitation," (that is, by an inhabitation in the effects of his power and grace, for otherwise the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily,) "but that one nature should be so mingled" (that is, conjoined) "with the other, that although that be of one kind which assumes, and that of another which is assumed, yet the diversity of them both should concur in such a unity or union, as that it is one and the same Son who, as he was a true man, said that he was less than the Father, or the Father was greater than he - so as he was true God, professes himself equal unto the Father." (from his 3rd sermon on the nativity)

Eusebius is also quoted to show that Christ is God for us, in the sense that He is the endurable go-between who shows the Father to us in a manner we can bear:

"By the beams of the sunlight, and life, and heat, unto the procreation, sustenance, refreshment, and cherishing of all things, are communicated. But if the sun itself should come down unto the earth, nothing could bear its heat and luster; our eyes would not be enlightened but darkened by its glory, and all things be swallowed up and consumed by its greatness; whereas, through the beams of it, every thing is enlightened and kindly refreshed. So is it with this eternal beam or brightness of the Father's glory. We cannot bear the immediate approach of the Divine Being; but through him, as incarnate, are all things communicated unto us, in a way suited unto our reception and comprehension."

We can also add the testimony of **Maxentius**: (Biblioth. Patr. pars prima:)

"We do not confound the diversity of the natures, howbeit we believe not what you affirm, that Christ was made God; but we believe that God was made Christ. For he was not made rich when he was poor; but being rich, he was made poor, that he might make us rich. He did not take the form of God when he was in the form of a servant; but being in the form of God, he took on him the form of a servant. In like manner, he was not made the Word when he was flesh; but being the Word, he was made flesh."

Other quotes are also brought out, but these should be enough. Owen's recap of this third chapter is lengthier than the rest. In fact, he even skips some other chapters in this section, so don't think that all of my summaries - Well, I'm trying to make them summaries! - will be this long.

Conclusion: There are truths that we are to believe and search out from Scripture, like the Incarnation, deity of Christ, Trinity. These are worthy of study and exposition because there is ample Scripture on these points.

But there are also areas which we may believe, but can not look carefully into beyond a certain limit, like the eternal generation of the Son. We cannot do this because, aside from inference, we do not have much in Scripture to go on. We actually go astray, and lead others astray, when we "*fill in the blanks*" with speculation and personal theories. As Owen warns, it puffs us up. It also makes us less receptive to revealed truth since we have left off preaching the Word of Life.

Another area in which we should not aim to "*help*" God is by trying to explain what God doesn't explain. The Trinity, for instance, is clearly inferred in the Word, but all attempts to explain how the Three can be One end up every time in denigrating the glory of God. We are just to teach that the *Father* is God, the *Son* is God, the *Holy Spirit* is God ... and yet, God is *One*. We are not to liken the Trinity to an eggshell or ice or vapor. This can lead all too easily to idolatrous notions of the Godhead.

Christologia Review, 5: Jesus Christ is the Foundation of the Father's Blessing for His Elect. He is also the Face of God, the Image of the invisible Father.

At some point into Owen's preface he admits he is in danger of making it unduly large, so he contents himself with highlighting just a few of the remaining chapters. This time we'll look at chapters 4, 5, and 7, skipping chapters that he also skipped in this preface.

Chapter 4: Jesus Christ is the Foundation of all that the church needs for salvation, that word being understood in its full biblical sense. God's wisdom, warning, instruction, message, and promise to His own are all found in Christ.

And why is Christ central in all of this? The 3-fold answer is :

1. The Father and Son had "*ineffable (unspeakable) mutual delight ... in those counsels from eternity*". This is far removed from **James Weldon Johnson's** "*I'm lonely. I think I'll make me a man.*"

2. This is the only way to communicate these counsels, pre-foundational speaking of Father with Son, to *us*.

3. The person of the incarnate Christ is the _expression, example and demonstration of all the grace intended from God for the blessing of the church, all to the glory of God. More on these when we get to the actual chapter.

In short, Christ is the cause of all good to us. Many of the ancient writers speak of this. Here is **Clemens Alexandrius**:

"He, therefore, is the Word, the Christ, and the cause of old of our being; for he was in God, and the cause of our well-being. But now he has appeared unto men, the same eternal Word, who alone is both God and man, and unto us the cause of all that is good". - Adhort. ad Gentes

John Owen concludes this section:
"As he was in God the cause of our being and well-being from eternity, he was the foundation of the divine counsels in the way explained; and in his incarnation, the execution of them all was committed unto him, that through him all actual good, all the fruits of those counsels, might be communicated unto us."

Chapter 5: Jesus Christ is the Face of God, the Image and Representative of the invisible Father. In the actual chapter there will be more thorough explanation of this. In short, Christ is the essential image of the Father because He is the eternal "*Monogenes*" ("*only-begotten*") from the Father. And because of the incarnation He is totally God and totally man. Christ is Exemplar in perfect human flesh of God's nature and a demonstration of His will for us. Returning to Clemens:

"The image of God is his own Word, the natural Son of the" (eternal) "Mind, the divine Word, the original Light of Light; and the image of the Word is man."

Clemens again, in "Paedagogus":

"The Word is the face, the countenance, the representation of God, in whom he is brought to light and made known."

Jerome, commenting on Psalm 66, writes:

"Let him cause his face to shine upon us; or lift up the light of his countenance upon us. What is the face of God? Even his image. For the apostle says, that the Son is the image of the Father. Wherefore, let him shine on us with his image; that is, cause his Son, which is his image, to shine upon us, that he may illuminate us; for the light of the Father and of the Son are the same."

Since Christ is the "express image" (ἀπεικόνιον), **Heb. 1:3**, and face of God, He is the representation of Him, and the only channel of all saving benefits are through Him given to believers. With this blessing in mind Paul begins and ends his epistles with phrases like "*grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*", **Phil. 1:2, Eph. 1:2, 1 Cor. 1:3**, and others.

This is not just some token phrase of expected courtesy. It reveals a profound truth: Whenever we read His Word God imparts peace and engraces us with a sense of His presence. But this is only true for the household of saints, seeing that we are indwelt by the wonderful Holy Spirit. All other Bible reading is mere dry mechanics. There is nothing of Christ for this second group, not having the Spirit.

Eusebius says that Christ is "*rightly called God-begotten*" since He "*alone bears in Himself the image of the ineffable and inconceivable Deity.*"

Owen adds, "*The divine personality of Christ consists in this, that the whole divine nature being communicated unto him by eternal generation, he is the image of God, even the Father, who by him is represented unto us.*"

The reason for Christ representing the Father to us is for us to have His image formed in us. This why false teachers do such damage: They give a distorted view of Christ - or they paint another Christ altogether: a Christ of their own imagination or agenda, not the One who represents the Father and is the source of all life-changing grace and wisdom. The Christ of a large segment of current Preterism falls in this category, a "savior" with a partial (and thus, powerless) atonement at Calvary.

The actual chapter 5 of the book - though not Owen's preview of it - covers much of the same territory of **Calvin's** *Institute* treatment of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King (Book 2, Chapter 15). There seems to be some indebtedness to Calvin - what post-Calvin writer would *not* be? However, Owen goes more into details and applications that Calvin, at least here, passes over.

From chapter 5: "*It is by the exercise and discharge of the office of Christ - as the **king**, **priest**, and **prophet** of the church - that we are redeemed, sanctified, and saved. Thereby does he immediately communicate all gospel benefits unto us - give us an access unto God here by grace, and in glory hereafter; for he saves us, as he is the mediator between God and man.*"

Owen begins this preface of **chapter 7**:

"*Upon the glory of this divine person of Christ depends the efficacy [effectiveness] of all his offices; an especial demonstration whereof is given in his prophetical office. So it is well expressed by* ***Irenaeus***" lib. 1 cap. 1:

"We could not otherwise have learned the things of God, unless our Master, being and continuing the" (eternal) "Word, had been made man. For no other could declare unto us the things of God, but his own proper Word. For who else has known the mind of the Lord? Or who else has been his counselor? Neither, on the other side, could we otherwise have learned, unless we had seen our Master, and heard his voice," (in his incarnation and ministry,) "whereby, following his works, and yielding obedience unto his doctrine, we may have communion with himself."

The rest of Owen's preface is over chapters 9 to the end, without designation of divisions. This is quite an interesting section, even though it is only in the preface.

The rest of Owen's preface is over chapters 9 to the end, without designation of divisions. This is quite an interesting section, even though it is only in the preface.

Christologia Review, 6: Trinity in Worship

This section assumes that all honor is due to the Son, expressed and demonstrated by praise, petition and obedience to Him.

"*Why do you call me, 'Lord. Lord', and do not the things which I say?*" - **Luke 6:46**.

The reason for this due honor is more closely examined. In order to do this, three more general truths need to be established, having to do with Scriptural worship of the Trinity:

1. Because the divine nature in each person of the Trinity is the same, when one is worshiped the others are as well - and equally - worshiped.

2. It is legitimate to call on any, or all, of the Persons of the Trinity, but it is "*not exemplified in the Scripture, nor among the ancient writers of the church*" to make a request of one, and then to repeat the same request to another person in the Trinity.

3. Because of His divine nature, and because of His perfect victory in His human nature, Jesus Christ is the proper object of all honor and worship.

A closer examination of these three points:
1. When we call o*n any* in the Godhead, we call on *all*, because we are calling on the same divine nature in all. Scripture teaches this:

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

It is only one name here spoken, not (as the modalists teach) because there are *not* three *Persons*, but because there *is* one *Nature*. "*God is One*." It is the same God in three persons. The "*Deity, substance, and power of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is one and the same; their dignity equal; their kingdom coeternal, in three perfect persons*." **- Theodoret**

Gregory Nazianzen, choosing just one of Owen's examples of this point, puts it even more concisely:

"The one name common to the three ("koinon twn triwn") is the Deity."

By the way, the modern modalists, as I said, twist this very passage away from its Christ- and God-glorifiying roots to make it teach "*Jesus only*", or - in the case of others - "*Father only*" theology. In the process they end up with a salvation that is not all God-accomplished. Works-salvation is the damning consequence of a Trinitarian theology, that is misconstrued by adding human reasoning or cultic concepts.

The ancient anti-Arian doxology succinctly announces an antidote to all of these errors:

"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost."

John Owen sums it up:

"The same glory, in every individual act of its assignation or ascription, is directed unto each person jointly and distinctly, on the account of the same divine nature in each of them. I need not produce any testimonies in the farther confirmation hereof; for, in all their writings against the Arians, they expressly and constantly contend that the holy Trinity (that is, the divine nature in three persons) is the individual object of all divine adoration, invocation, and all religious worship; and that by whatever personal name - as the Father, Son, or Spirit - we call on God, it is God absolutely who is adored, and each person participant of the same nature."

2. God's three persons are often invoked in Scripture: That is, prayers in the Bible begun to the Father are often ended as addresses to the Son, or begun to the Son and then closed in His name (as if He was a third party). This is all legitimate. What is not seen in the Bible is requesting something of one member of the Trinity and then *repeating that same request to an other*, as if the Son wasn't already concerned in a prayer to the Father. This is because the Three are one. To paraphrase **Epiphanius**, "*Though there are three Persons, they are counted in one name*". You can see this in **Matt. 28:19**, where the "*one name*" is applied to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

3. Because of Christ's nature, and because of His perfect victory over the world, the flesh, the devil, He is the proper object of all honor and worship. This is the point that gets most attention in this section, and rightly so. It is insulting to the divine glory that much of Christianity tries to wheedle some credit to himself, in the process cheating God of His glory.

The depth and loftiness of many of the following quotes show that there were at least some ancient writers who were not man-centered (self-centered) in their theology. They knew that all things (including their own rescue) were "*of Him and through Him and to Him*", **Rom. 11:36**.

About this victory Owen writes:
"It belonged unto the wisdom and righteousness of God, that Satan should be conquered and subdued in and by the same nature which he had prevailed against, by his suggestion and temptation. To this purpose that holy writer speaks" (I think Owen refers to **Augustine**. He is unclear here), *"(lib. 3 cap. 20,) ... Words plainly divine; an illustrious testimony of the faith of the ancient church, and expressive of the principal mystery of the gospel! [Augustine quote begins here] "Wherefore, as we said before, he united man unto God. For if man had not overcome the adversary of men, the enemy had not been justly conquered; and, on the other hand, if God had not given and granted salvation, we could never have a firm, indefeasible possession of it; and if man had not been united unto God, he could not have been partaker of immortality. It behaved, therefore, the Mediator between God and man, by his own participation of the nature of each of them, to bring them both into friendship and agreement with each other."*

A little further he continues his quotation from the same writer:

"The all-powerful Word of God, no way defective in righteousness, set himself against the apostasy justly also; redeeming from him (Satan, the head of the apostasy) the things which were his own - not with force, as he bare rule over us, insatiably making rapine [unjust seizure] of what was not his own - but he, the Lord, redeeming us with his own blood, giving his soul for our soul, and his flesh for ours, wrought out our deliverance."

And then Owens observes:

"[It] is a fruit of divine wisdom, that our deliverance should be wrought in and by the me nature wherein and whereby we were ruined" ... but at the same time "it should be free from all that contagion which invaded our nature by the fall. And these things are divinely expressed. "Our Lord," saith he, "had not gathered up these things in himself, had not he been made flesh and blood, according unto its original creation.""

*"[N]one of the ancient writers do so frequently express the fall of Adam by our apostasy from God, and our recovery by a recapitulation in Christ, as **Irenaeus** - his recapitulation being nothing but the "anakephalaioo" mentioned by the apostle, Ephesians 1:10"*

However, It is inadvisable for us to be so quick to pronounce what was *necessary* in God's plan of redemption and what was not. To make those kind of judgments is to pretend to see things from God's lofty perspective and not from our low position. However this didn't deter confident scholastics (**Duns Scotus, Magnus, Osiander**) from insisting dogmatically that, for instance, *if man had never sinned Christ would still have become incarnate.*

Yet we can say that Christ's Incarnation was necessary *because God planned it*. Certainly all that all-powerful God wills becomes necessity by the force of His sovereignty. In that sense, the Fall was also. And this is what many of the earlier writers also wrote.

Returning to Christ as the proper object of our worship because of the Incarnation, Owen cites **Irenaeus** twice:

"Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who, from his own infinite love, was made what we are, that he might make us what he is;" that is, by the restoration of the image of God in us."

"Being the Son of God always with the Father, and being made man, he reconciled or gathered up in himself the long-continued exposing of men," (unto sin and judgment,) "bringing in salvation in this compendious way, (in this summary of it,) that what we had lost in Adam - that is, our being in the image and likeness of God - we should recover in Christ."

Clemens Alexandrinus writes to the same purpose, in *Adhort. ad Gentes*, that *"The Word of God was made man, that you might learn of a man how man may become" (as) "God."*

Note: A few of the ancients were curiously uncareful in their phraseology, as here, this being the reason for Owen adding the parenthetical and somewhat corrective "as". However, I would say that even this revised quote is a misstep.

And from **Ambrose**, in **Psalm 119**, we have:

"The image of God, that is, the Word of God, came unto him who was after the image of God, that is man. And this image of God seeks him who was after the image of God, that he might seal him with it again, and confirm him, because you had lost that which you had received."

Owen continues, *"**Augustine** in one instance gives a rational account why it was condecent* (proper or fitting) *unto divine wisdom that the Son, and not the Father or the Holy Spirit, should be incarnate - which we also inquire into"*

"The Father did not assume flesh, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son only; that he who in the Deity was the Son of the Father, should be made the Son of man, in his mother of human race; that the name of the Son should not pass unto any other, who was not the Son by an eternal nativity."

Not to go into all the quotations and writers that Owen makes use of, we'll look at just two more.

Augustine, again (Enchirid. ad Laurentius, chapter 99) makes an observation that I have seen from more than one modern Reformed author, that God would still be just even if all went to Hell. Yet it is a mercy of His when He saves any. Augustine enlarges upon this:

"Behold, the whole race of mankind, by the just judgment of God, so condemned in the apostatical root, that if no one were thence delivered, yet no man could rightly complain of the justice of God; and that those who are freed, ought so to be freed, that, from the greater number who are not freed, but left under most righteous condemnation, it might be manifest what the whole mass had deserved, and whither the judgment of God due unto them would lead them, if his mercy, which was not due, did not relieve them."

The great purpose, says Owen, of Christ being here described is *"that we may love him, and thereby be transformed into his image."*

The last quote is from **Jerome** (Epistle 66 to Pammachius):

"Whether you read or write, whether you watch or sleep, let the voice of love (to Christ) sound in your ears; let this trumpet stir up your soul: being overpowered (brought into an ecstasy) with this love, seek Him on your bed whom your soul desires and longs for."

Powerful appeal! And this last quote from a writer who had many theological glitches and incipient Romeward leanings. Yet, like all the rest quoted above, Jerome recognized that *there is great comfort, strength and motivation in knowing Jesus aright. To know Him is to adore Him*. Christians of this ancient caliber would be blessedly immune to some of the sugar-coated incentives to "*decide for Christ*" or dazzled by poisonous novelties like an atonement delayed until AD 70. All these doctrines turn attention away from the centrality of the Cross in our salvation.

The saints above, by contrast, had such a large view of God that they praised Him for who He is - and that He decided to elect *them*! *They were not purpose-driven, but God-drawn.* They were God-drawn because they heard God-glorifying preachers like those quoted above, and recognized the voice of Truth in them.

"*If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me*".

No trickery needed. Any cleverness in presentation or ear-tingling innovations to the Gospel would only obscure it. These men quoted here, however imperfectly, lifted Christ up, as He is in all His blinding/unbinding glory. And those for whom He died will recognize the light and come to Him.

Even now the Ax is laid to the Root of the Trees

Matthew 3:10 has come up in a couple of recent discussions. The discussion – controversy, actually – centered not on the ax, but on the *tree*. That is, whether or not the endangered tree was the covenant nation of Israel. And the assertion was that that ax fell on them with the fall of Jerusalem, AD 70. The other view is that the ax falls on individuals. They are the trees expected to produce personal fruit. Interestingly, commentaries also differ on the interpretation of the passage. The more careful ones, in my opinion, acknowledge both possibilities. And that is what I also believe on this. Although (just between you and me) I blew it at first and too quickly adopted the view that this passage was strictly referring to individuals. However, looking at both the **Matthew** and **Luke** passages seem to point to both interpretations, but with a marked emphasis on individual (over covenant or corporate) application.

A second, connected controversy is the question: *Which group is being addressed, all Jews and Gentiles or only Jews*? Oddly, **Don K. Preston** makes the assertion that the latter interpretation is correct. If we are to believe him this passage teaches the coming judgment of Israel and Israel only. Here is what he wrote:

"*But, John was The Messenger heralding the imminent coming of the Lord in judgment (Matthew 3 / Mark 1:1-2)– the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord.*

Therefore, as The Messenger, was Elijah. The Coming of the Messenger Was the Coming of Elijah! It is critical to understand that the Day of Malachi 3 would be the time of judgment on Israel – just like Matthew 23 – for violating Torah. This is demonstrated in v. 6, where the Lord said, "I will come near to you in judgment," That judgment would be for violating Torah, specifically Exodus 22:21f and Deuteronomy 27:19f: mandates against sorcerers, extortioners, abusers of widows, etc.. Those passages make it clear that the judgment for those sins would be national judgment on Israel (Exodus 22:24)! "

And again, at the end of his article Preston writes:

"John was undeniably The Messenger who, just like Elijah, was to prepare for the Day of the Lord in judgment – the Day of the Lord against Israel for violating Torah!"

The quote is from one of Preston's "*Responding to the Critics*" articles, "I*s Elijah Coming Before the End or has he Come?*".

Even though Preston's argument was against the false futurist notion of an imagined Elijah still to come he unfortunately counters it with another notion that is also false – that the message from John (and from Elijah before him) – was a warning of judgment solely on Israel!

There are several proofs against Preston's notion. Maybe the best one is to compare the Matthew verse with the fuller Luke passage, a passage that he does not quote.

Here are the two passages:

Matthew 3:7-12
"7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8. Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,
9. and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
10. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.
11. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
12. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.""

Luke 3:7-17
"7. Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
8. Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.
9. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."
10. So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"
11. He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."
12. Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"
13. And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."
14. Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?"
So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."
15. Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not,
16. John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.
17. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

Along with the obvious similarities there are also added details in Luke that help us to better understand John's message of threatened judgment. Just on *whom*, exactly, might this ax fall? Well, the soldiers certain felt convicted by John's message, "*And what shall we do?*"

Obviously, the judgment concerned them too. It can't be absolutely determined which soldiers these were, Jewish or Gentile (like Cornelius), seeing that several nationalities were soldiering in Judea at this time. However we have other examples, like Felix. When Paul "*reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, Felix trembled*", **Acts 24:25**. This Roman (of Greek, not Jewish ancestry) clearly was never under obligation to the Torah.

Felix and at least some of the soldiers in Judea were not under Preston's imagined judgment of violating the Torah. Many probably had never even heard of Torah. Thus Preston's teaching is shown to be incorrect.

And much worse than merely incorrect. A covenant-only judgment interpretation takes away from the immediacy and power of these passages, both for John's first-century hearers as well as all readers of these passages ever since!

There is room here for both individual and – finally, with the fall of Jerusalem - covenant judgment:

1."*Every tree … cut down and thrown into the fire*", **Matt. 3:10**; **Luke 3:9**, is a warning of *individual judgment*.
2."*Thoroughly clean out His threshing floor*", **Matt. 3:12**; **Luke 3:17**, has a covenantal aspect. It is what happened at the Parousia, the threshing floor being not only Jerusalem, but also Masada and all the other fortresses of the covenant-breaking Jews. Arguably, it could extend to the arenas and the mines throughout the Empire – wherever the surviving Jews ended up in slavery.

This "*ax against the tree*" portended judgment against "*them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth…. Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that does evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek.*", **Romans 2: 8, 9.**

Christ Left Heaven? Yes and No: John 3:13

This article examines further a piece I had written earlier on Christ having always been in Heaven, even during the days of His flesh. Some of the best insight on this fascination topic comes from **John Owen** in his "*Theologia*", a careful, methodical, rich but difficult book.

Taking the trouble to study writers like like Owen will be a great source of encouragement. But it will also be an eye-opener when you compare works of this caliber with modern offerings on the same subjects, on theology in general and on the person and work of Christ in particular. Many modern writers and bloggers are so anxious that we have a Christ to relate to - they no longer have a Christ worth relating to.

Here is Owen's quote on **John 3:13**:
"It is the most fond and wicked imagination of the Socinians [forerunners, of a sort, of the Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians, taking their name from the Polish heretic, Socinus], *invented to countenance their disbelief and hatred of his divine person, that during the time of his flesh he was taken up into heaven, and there taught the doctrine of the Gospel, as Muhammad feigned concerning himself and his Alkoran* [The Koran].

The reason and foundation of his perfect knowledge of God was, his being the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father, and not a fictitious rapture of his human nature. To this purpose have we his own testimony, John 3:13,

"And no man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

The matter whereof he treats is the revelation of heavenly things; For, finding Nicodemus slow in the understanding of the doctrine and necessity of regeneration, which yet was plain and evident in comparison of some other heavenly mysteries, he asks of him,

"If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not," (things wrought in the earth and in your own breasts,) "how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?"

if I declare unto you the deep counsels of the will of God above, verse 12. But hereon a question might arise, how he should himself come to the knowledge of these heavenly things whereof they had never heard before, and which no other man could tell them of, especially considering what he had said before, verse 11,

"We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen."

Hereof he gives an account in these words. Wherefore the ascending into heaven, which he denies unto all men whatever - "No man has ascended up to heaven" [Vs. 13] - is an entrance into all the divine, heavenly counsels of God; no man either has or ever had a full comprehension of these heavenly things but he himself alone. And unto him it is ascribed on a double account:

first, That he came down from heaven; secondly, That when he did so, he yet still continued in heaven: which two properties give us such a description of the person of Christ as declare him a full possessor of all the counsels of God. He descended from heaven in his incarnation, whereby he became the Son of man; and he is and was then in heaven in the essence and glory of his divine nature. This is the full of what we assert."

These comments from Owen on this verse brings, first of all, these two main points to mind:
1. Christ *came down* from Heaven.
2. He *remained* in Heaven. The basis of this last point is the last phrase of the verse, "the Son of man who is in Heaven". This is the astounding thing, that Christ having come down to Earth - is at the same time still present in Heaven!

Now there are two objections that some would raise against this thought:
1.Cultists and others who deny the deity of Christ sometimes maintain that this verse 13 is already the part where John leaves off quoting Jesus and where his own comments begin. By doing this they make it refer to the fact that Christ is now (at the time of John's writing - AD 60-61) in Heaven. This is just plain caviling and can be seen for what it is by just reading the context, and that there is no indication of such a break at this point.
2. On a more noble level, some Christians (using some modern translations) believe that these last four words are not in the original. Although I disagree with that (for reasons I won't go into here) the same point is found elsewhere in Scripture, that Christ needs to have been always in Heaven, even though he was for a while on Earth in His limited body of flesh. **Colossians 1:17**:

"*And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."*

Included in this "*consist*" is the idea of "*maintenance*", or "*holding together*". Jesus Christ is not only Creator. He is also the Maintainer of Creation. The question then is: Did Christ cease to maintain things while he was on Earth? Or - the question beneath this first question - did Christ *cease* to be omnipresent while on Earth? Admittedly, this is a tricky subject, and one which Owen delves thoroughly into, both here in "*Christologia*" and even more in his "*The Glory of Christ*".
Moreover, Christ's always being in Heaven is the solution for such problems like His saying to the repentant thief, "*Today you will be with me in paradise*.", **Luke 24:43**. But it is traditionally accepted that Christ said this on Friday. His body was buried and was resurrected on Sunday - well past "*today*"

The solution is twofold:
1. Everyone who dies in Christ goes to Christ, **Phil, 1:23**. Christ is always there to meet us when we die.
2. Paradise was not some murky, subterranean holding area for the saints, it is Heaven itself (compare **2 Cor. 12:2** with **12:4**). The reason why the fictions about Christ's supposed infernal preaching circuit is so irksome is that it obscures the true glory of heaven, salvation and Christ. As long as many are so ear-tingled with speculations about these fictions, they will be unable to appreciate the greater truth of Christ's omnipresence and the satisfying comfort of knowing that our dying brings us immediately to Him.

A good source for further study, besides Owen, on the thief on the cross and Christ's omnipresence is the Commentary of Matthew Henry. But the very best source, of course, is to prayerfully study and restudy Scripture on this topic.

Hebrews 6: Things Not Accompanying Salvation

A friend wrote to me:

"*I believe that the Bible says that we are to "watch" (see to it that we do not fall into sin) so that we will not "fall away" because if we do that after we have been enlightened and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, it will be impossible for us to "renew unto repentance" by crucifying the Son of God again. Or do you have a different understanding of what* ***Heb 6:4-8*** *means?*"

Part of the answer to this question is to keep the whole context in mind. Here is the passage:

"*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.*"

These verses have both an audience relevance and a universal one. It is important to keep both in mind. Audience relevance – as well as the very title of this epistle - tells us that this writing has a special significance. Paul's readership here has a wide variety of understanding and belief in the Gospel. Some are very committed; others not so much, not totally convinced that the old wine isn't better.

Overshadowing the whole Jewish church – and the reason for the urgency of Hebrew's message – is the soon approaching *eschaton*, the end of the Jewish age. But there are other articles that deal with *that* aspect. In this article I want to examine how the passage concerns believers and would-be believers of all ages, not just the first century.

There are different types of desires for heavenly things. The followers of Christ in John 6 were quite impressed with the miraculous work of Jesus. He had fed them in the wilderness and they responded enthusiastically, "*Lord, give us this bread always!*", **John 6:34**. They called Him Lord. They followed Him – but only for a short while. And when their Lord started speaking of the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood they left Him.

These are the ones who *"have tasted the heavenly gift"*. Not His bread, but His **teaching**. They were initially impressed with His message, emotionally carried away but not spiritually convinced. They didn't really believe.

John Owen, in his Hebrews commentary on this passage, remarked that *"When affections go before believing, they are little worth; but when they follow it, they are exceeding acceptable and precious in the sight of God.*"

All of these things mentioned in verses 4 to 8, except the repentance, are things that do not strictly have to do with salvation. How do we know this? The apostle admits as much in the very next **verse 9**, speaking of the *"things that accompany salvation"*. If the things of verse 9 accompany salvation, then by context and the writer's very logic, the "*things*" in verses 4 through 8 are something else.

Enlightenment, tasting and partaking are not the same as justification, sanctification or adoption. They (enlightenment, tasting, partaking) may *seem* to these persons as being salvation-related, hence their presumption and hardening.

This passage in Hebrews is not a caution against Christians, but against those who *think* they are Christians but have no desire to walk the walk. The Apostle as much as says so in verse 9 (which very often goes unquoted). A new creature cannot become un-new. Old things, **2nd Cor. 5:17.** do not pass away only to come back and overcome a Christian. You know why? Because our new life does not just consist of new *behavior*, but of a new *residency*: The Holy Spirit intimately leads us into all truth. God does not just "clean up our act", He impresses on us the need to quit acting. He gives us a new "*principle within*", as the old hymn puts it. We have the Spring of Living Waters inside of us. This is why we do not fall away. Once we possess *any* of these "*things that accompany*" the new life, we do not lose them. And God does not lose us. When we became new Christians we are remagnetized with a Christward affinity: The things above have a certain pull on us. Once again, John Owen says it very well:

"*The hearts of believers are like the needle touched by the lodestone [magnet], which cannot rest until it comes to the point whereunto, by the secret virtue of it, it is directed. For being once touched by the love of Christ, receiving therein an impression of secret ineffable virtue, they will ever be in motion, and restless, until they come unto him, and behold his glory. That soul which can be satisfied without it, - that cannot be eternally satisfied with it, - is not partaker of the efficacy of his intercession* [recorded in John 17]."

"*Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*." **- 2 Cor. 5:17.**

John Flavel wrote this as well, in "*The Method of Grace: How the Spirit Works*":

"*And this change is not made by altering and rectifying the disorders of the life only, leaving the temper and frame of the heart still carnal; but by implanting a supernatural permanent principle in the soul. It shall be in him a well of water. John 4:14 Principles are to a course of action, as fountains or springs to the streams and rivers that flow from them; and hence the constancy of renewed souls in the course of godliness.*"

Hebrews seems to be one of the most misapplied of the New Testament books. The misapplication of Hebrews 6 arises from a misunderstanding of the nature of new creaturehood. The "*faith*" that is imagined as lose-able in Hebrews 6 is not really lost at all - it was never there to begin with. As sure as God is faithful to His promises, true faith will always have a successful final outcome.

Circumstance and promise, in the long run, must meet together in the forge of faith, **Heb. 4:2**. And here is the cause of the failure of much of the "*faith*" of many. It is not a real faith, so it does not have a real victory. There are many today who are being promised "*peace, peace*" who are still not even aware of the nature of the war. Christ-lite is promised in many seeker-sensitive churches, but not the Christ of the Bible. Then this idol, this dashboard Jesus, is given the seal of approval by such heterodox teachers such as Charles Ryrie, Greg Laurie, Zane Hodges, and others saying that we just need to "*repeat this prayer after me*". They tell us that we do not - *must* not - look for signs of new creaturehood in any who mouthed The Prayer. To do so would – they tell us also - be "*adding to our salvation*". Yet Scripture admonishes that our assurance is to be based also on our walk, not just a certain verse, **2nd Peter 1:1-11; I John 2:6**.

Bottom line: Hebrews 6 is not speaking of Christians, but of those who presume to be such, yet not desiring any of those "*things accompanying salvation*". It is not without reason that this passage often comes alive to many Christians who fear losing their salvation. I believe it is God's means of waking up those whose walk had been very worldly, to get them to examine themselves whether they really are in the faith.

If Full Preterism is True: Nothing Left for Us?

It's a common challenge given to Full Preterists that if the Lord came in AD 70 then everything would be fulfilled, "*nothing left for us*", as one person told me. Others have said that the logical eschatology this would lead to would be Israel Only (IO) or universalism.

But this is based on a faulty understanding of Full Preterism, partly based on misrepresentations of our belief and also on simple misunderstanding of audience and temporal relevance. That is, to whom were these passages addressed and when were they supposed to have happened?

What happened in AD 66 was that the Christians of *that* time - wherever the Gospel was preached - were rescued, taken away from the ones troubling them. They were raptured to be with the Lord forever. They were changed according to Christ's promise to be "*like the angels*", **Luke 20:36**. What happened in AD 70 was the downfall of Jerusalem and the very means of performing even the outward rites of the Old Covenant, the inward reality and glory having long since departed. Subsequently, the next three years saw the outliers of resistance, Masada and the other two or three holdout fortresses laid waste.

Moreover the Parousia did not just concern Israel, nor was it only a judgment against covenant-breaking Israel. Unfortunately, that is what Don K. Preston and other prominent preachers of Covenant Eschatology teach. However, they overlook that the judgment concerned not only those Jews under the Old Covenant. This coming judgment would affect *the entire world of that time*, Jews and Gentiles, roughly the area of the Roman Empire.

When Paul "*reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come Felix trembled*", **Acts 24:25**. But, according to Preston, Felix, a non-Jew, should have had no reason to fear. Paul also announced to his hearers on Mars Hill, almost entirely non-Jews, that God would "*judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained, in that He has raised Him from the dead*", **Acts 17:31**.

But that does not *leave us with nothing*. We Christians will all be, at our deaths, the same in the same situation as those raptured saints, changed in our bodies and with the Lord forever. Those promises to them are still applicable to us, although not in the same way. There is still sin in this world. There is still salvation. There is still the Word preached on and believed in. And the bright Kingdom of God is growing ever stronger.

"*Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.*" **- Daniel 7:27-28**

Multitudes in the Valley of Decisional Regeneration

Years ago my wife and I visited a Baptist church in Del Rio, Texas. It brought back memories for both of us. Not good memories. We had both spent years in Baptist churches - she grew up in them. What we had heard that day were examples of much of the faulty theology we both had been exposed to. What the preacher did - an older man who should have known better – is get out his eisegetical tongs and pluck out little micro-verses to justify his points. The church was gearing up for a "revival" so, in preparation, it was high cherry-picking season.

Joel and Joshua wrested from context
"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision…", **Joel 3:14a**

I honestly forget now if he even finished the verse. However, he mainly just thumped on the phrase above and admonished his hearers,

"*Many of you will find yourselves in the valley of decision....You have a decision to make.*"

The decision from this pastor, of course, was whether to choose a personal relation with Christ, or having had done that, to "*make him Lord*".

B*ut the verse does not mean that at all.* This decision is a judicial one, one of judgment. And - most importantly - it is entirely God's decision. This verse is not at all about what we ought to do. It is about what God forewarned His covenant people that He will do in the Day of the Lord. And this all played out, as we Preterists know, in the Parousia of the first century.

But none of this was on this pastor's mind, quickly moving on to his next proof-text, **Joshua 24:15**,

"*Choose you this day whom you will serve....*"

The key word being "*choose*". And, not being of any use for him, he left out the inconvenient rest of the verse about "*the gods of the Amorites*". Obviously there needed to have been an explanation of the reason and the background for Joshua's charge to the Israelites, many who were already in a backsliding state.

It amazes and saddens me how often, out of all the wonderful truths that can be gleaned out of this book of Joshua, mainly two texts are gingerly excised out of it to make forced applications. They will use this verse of Joshua 24:15 as a flying buttress to hold up the castle-in-the-sky of *decisional regenerationalism.*

Few churches of this sort present a sermon from, say, **Joshua 21:43- 45**:

"*So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which he had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.*"

This passage is further corroborated with **Joshua 23:14- 15.**

So why are these verses not often preached, not often highlighted in many modern Bibles? Because they shoot down the whole concept of the "*God is not through with Israel*" Millennial Jewish Kingdom.

According to this neglected passage, the Jews were getting no more real estate. What God had promised them God had given them. "*Not a word failed*" of that promise. The warning of Joshua (and of God), sadly, also came into effect. The very thing the Jews were warned about came true to them. Those warnings, according to **Zechariah 1:6**, "*overtook*" the Jewish people.

The Preterist's Task

Instead of only focusing on the time statements ("*this generation*") or the importance of audience relevance we need to also take away from futurists these passages that they have been so indoctrinated in. We do this by patiently clarifying the respective contexts of each of their pet proof-texts, as well as providing cross-references.

We need to search out and understand where the actual disconnect is in the mind of the futurist and focus on *those* areas, rather than resorting to points and proofs for which they are not ready. Only after we effectively deal with their doubts and "*But what about?*"s can they really appreciate what happened in AD 66-70. And – more importantly – gain richer understanding of the Atonement and the New Covenant.

Covenant Soteriology: The Cancer Within Full Preterism

This is not *their* name for this group. It goes most often by the name of Covenant Eschatology, but it is really a doctrine of salvation (soteriology), not eschatology. And the tragedy is that this unbiblical subgroup of Preterism is mistaken for the whole. Many Christians, sensing errors in their own eschatology "-isms" and potentially open to Preterism, come across these particular unbiblical teachings and give Full Preterism in its entirety a hard pass.

Instead of interpreting the Old Testament in the clearer light of the New they force an Old Testament grid over the New. Case in point is **Don K. Preston's** over-emphasizing the Levitical Feasts as the most important foundation for New Covenant truth. To achieve this end he contrives spurious connections like making **Lev. 9**, and not a passage like **Isa. 53**, be about the Atonement. In his *Morning Musings* Preston proclaimed that "*The atonement was not completed until the high priest came out of the most holy place, Leviticus 9:22*."

He downplays the fact that that chapter in Leviticus actually concerns the dedication of Aaron's sons into the priesthood. It is not a passage from which to derive central Atonement doctrine. For that we have many other passages both in the New and Old Testament, connecting the Atonement with the Cross. But Preston, in all his writings and videos largely ignores those passages. Just as he largely ignores the Cross.

That is the crucial event, the actual physical death of Christ, shedding His blood. However, for Preston the Atonement, redemption, and justification are all essentially held in abeyance until magically activated in AD 70. This is all so contrary to Scripture. Moreover, those main passages of the Bible that could have corrected his doctrine he largely bypasses: **Isaiah 53, Hebrews 7, Romans 3 - 5**. Or if he does refer to them it is only to point to a word here or tense there to seemingly justify his teaching.

He misses the forest for the trees. And he misidentifies the trees.

He is the grand deflector. The main central theme of the Bible is salvation through Christ's actual (not spiritual!) death on the Cross. He avoids this, saying, paradoxically, that the price was paid before Christ even died! And that He "*died twice"*! And that the Atonement wasn't fully secured for the saints until AD 70!

However, the Atonement was indeed secured for them - and us - at the Cross. The benefit of that came down to the saints and to us ever since at Pentecost when, Christ having being presented to the Father, the empowering Holy Spirit came down. "Pentecost" - "50 days". NOT almost 40 years. *Why would Christ wait for almost 4 decades to follow through as our High Priest on what He had already accomplished for the saints?*

Christ's blood shed for us *was* the New Covenant:

"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." **- Matt. 26:28**

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that make an atonement for the soul." **- Lev. 17:11**

When Christ died for us He, in effect, gave us His life. **Lev. 17:11** describes the divine intent of the whole sacrificial system. It also points to the final, perfect, eternally effective sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Death for death and life for life. He died for us so that we could live in in Him.

He nailed the Old Covenant, "*the handwriting of ordinances that was against us*" to the Cross. **Col. 2:14.** He did not take it (the handwriting of ordinances) with Him to the Most Holy Place. And He certainly did not put this off for almost 40 years. So what could there be left of this Old Covenant? It was taken away at the Cross. Scripture is clear on all of this.

Any teaching that denies this is another Gospel.

Full Preterist – Not Quite Full.

I would certainly consider myself a Full Preterist, although some other Full Preterists may not consider me such. I thought about that when I came across the Wedding Feast parable of **Matthew 22**:

1. And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, 2. "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3. and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. 4. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' 5. But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, 6. while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. 7. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. 9. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' 10. And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.11. "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. 12. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. 13. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14. For many are called, but few are chosen."

There is a foolish consistency of some Full Preterists to conclude that, since they believe "*all things are fulfilled*" then, logically, there is no Judgment (capital J). It too, they maintain, must be a thing of the past. We, on the sunny side of AD 70 need not concern ourselves with this. Some also even say that there is no such thing as sin. But this is not true. Consider the passage above.

1. The inhabitants of the city either had made light of the marriage feast or abused the messengers. The King sends troops against their city. This clearly points to the Romans coming against and conquering Jerusalem. The city is burned.

2. But we still – centuries after that judgment - have an invitation to something comparable to that wedding feast . And we will have a new crop of attendees, worthy and unworthy. And the unworthy of these post AD 70 guests are very much like those unworthies of the 1st century. Like them, they also will have the wrong attire because they will not put on Christ, His righteousness. Many are right now - and many others will be - within the general domain of Christendom, but not actually be in Christ.

It is an worthwhile exercise for us Preterists to examine what we were taught earlier, discarding what is unscriptural. But now, more than ever, we need to distinguish between human tradition that makes God's Word of no effect and foundational tenets of faith that would – if we deny them – make *our* faith of no effect. It did not all happen in AD 70. We are in a Kingdom that is ever-growing, responsible for spreading the message of the everlasting Gospel. Awesome, profound truth is in our possession.

This Sect ... Everywhere Spoken Against: Preterism Under Pressure

"*But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.*" - **Acts 28:2**2

This is spoken against a remarkable new seeming outgrowth of Judaism called "*the Way*" and its followers "*Christians*". But in this day Christianity - or Christendom, to be precise - has normalized considerably in accordance with the influence of the world, the original emphases now largely forgotten. Christianity today is not so much spoken *against* as *ignored*. The verse now fits Preterism much better. And among Preterists it applies especially to the Individual Body View. IBV is spoken against from both sides. From the Corporate Body View (CBV) Preterists because we are supposedly futurists in disguise. From the futurists just because we are Preterists. And also because they see the crazy teaching of Covenant Eschatology (CE) Preterism and think that we believe their teaching as well.

The name is the same but, borrowing from an old car commercial, This is not your grandfather's Preterism! A good candidate for this patriarchal role (if I can use the term) would be **JS Russell**, author of "*The Parousia*". And he would be shocked to see how the Classic Preterism of his time has downgraded.

Any new doctrine (or seemingly new, in this case) always benefits from peer review. But there is a difference between peer review and peer pressure. And that is what Preterism contends with and, especially, the classic Preterism that JS Russell promoted, the belief in the *actual, experiential rapture of individual believers in the 1st century*. CE disavows this rapture, eschewing even the term, explaining the event as a *mere covenantal change* of those saints, a change not experienced but, it seems, one that they would have to take on faith. However, true faith would have not even accept such teaching in the first place!.

But Preterism, Classic or otherwise, is not a belief that is easy for many to accept. Many otherwise astute Christians would speak more in favor of it were it not for the blowback they would receive from peers that they regard more than God or His Word. **John 12:43** comes to mind here:

"*For they loved praise from men more than praise from God.*"

And there are professional, social, and financial considerations at work. Many Christians, myself included, have lost teaching positions and friends, after speaking up for Preterism.

We have our work cut out for us. Yet we remain convinced by Scripture that this view is correct. However, if we are wrong, then let opponents show us from Scripture in context - not *proof-texts*, *creeds* or *tradition*. In my fourteen years of Preterist belief the only arguments I have encountered were those last three responses.

The comfort for Preterists comes when he or she realizes that being on the side of truth is also being on the side of God. Numbers - or the lack of them - are not a consideration.

"*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" - **Romans 8:31**

The New Creation & The First Creation

A Comparison for Contemplation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! - **2Cor. 5:17**

I came across a good piece of writing from **John Flavel** called "**Method of Grace**". In one of his chapters he examines the reason for our being called "*new creation"*. The phrase invites comparison to the first creation of Genesis 1. Some of these points below were from Flavel. I think that works like his are very helpful for Christians. It is just such a shame that there is a barrier between us and these Puritan writers; their language is kind of slow-going, yet there is often such profundity in their insights.

I believe that one of the best ways for us to grow in wisdom and knowledge of God and in discernment is not so much to argue and convince others as it is to just spend so much time and focus in God's Word that we instinctively recognize the wheat from the chaff. Like the bank tellers, this is gained by "accurately dividing the Word of Truth" so that we "may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God. " **Phil.1:10 - 11**

How is the New Creation (every Christian) like God's First Creation?

1. Both have God as the Author.

"God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." **2 Corinthians 4:6.**

Flavel says, "It is as absurd for any man to say, I make myself to repent or believe, as it is to say, I made myself to exist."

2. The first thing created in both is light. **Gen.1:3**

"And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." **Colossians 3:10.**

3. Both are created "*ex nihilo" - "out of nothing*".

Probably most Christians believe that God did not need to use preexisting matter for the Creation. There were none, in fact. The analogy continues that God created believers out of nothing in the sense that we did not bring anything of value to Him when we became saved. We truly "*have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us"*. **2nd Cor. 4:7**

"*Who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.*" **1 Peter 2:9, 10**

We often hear well-meaning people say, "If only so-and-so would be saved, God could really use his

talent of singing (or speaking, etc.)" But this overlooks the fact that God is the one who gives us those gifts of the Spirit for His purpose and in His timing. How can we look at someone before they are even saved and see their spiritual gifts? " '*Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,*' *says the LORD Almighty*. "**Zech. 4:6**

And speaking of the Spirit...

4. Both creations are moved upon by the Spirit of God.

Genesis 1:2 tells us that "*the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters*". The Christ who was present at the creation tells Nicodemus *"The wind blows where it wishes"..."So is every one that is born of the Spirit.",* **John 3:8.** ..."*That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" **John 3:6**.

5. The Word of God spoke both into existence.

"*By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth. For he spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.*" **Psalm 33:6, 9.**

"*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and remains for ever*" . **1 Peter 1:23.**

"*Of his own will he gave birth to us by the word of truth.*" **James 1:18**

6. Both creations are actively maintained by the "*Word of His Power*".

John Flavel wrote:

"So it is with the new creation, which entirely depends upon the preserving power which first formed it. "Preserved in Jesus Christ", **Jude 1**. "*Who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation.",* **1 Peter 1:5**. "*As we live, move, and have our being in God* " **Acts 17:28**, so in a spiritual sense we continue believing and delighting in God, without whose continued influence upon our souls we could do neither."

Flavel passes over one of the best verses for this wonderful truth, **Colossians 1:17:**
*"He (*that is, Christ) *is before all things, and in him all things hold together. "*

7. God saw and said that both creations were good. **Genesis 1:31** ("**very good"**).

See also **Galatians 6:15**. If we are in Christ, if we are walking in the Spirit, the Father is pleased with us because we are "*accepted in the Beloved*".

I hope that this little look at what it means to be a new creation is encouraging to you, and that it will suggest further avenues for studying!

New Life in Christ: What Free Will *Won't* Do

Those who argue strongly for the necessity of free-will haven't considered what it means to be a creature in Christ. The two concepts, just as in grace and works, are incompatible. If we are in Christ, "*All things are new*", **2 Cor. 5:17**.

The converted life, although for many it is not immediately apparent, means a radical overhaul, a major reorientation in our being. As Christ is formed in us, our selfish free-will is slowly repurposed to the desires of the One who "*works in us to will and do of His good pleasure"*, **Phil. 2:13**.

Free-will a Misnomer
Free-will is not really free. It will not obey the new directions put in our hearts. The fish may have the free-will to swim wherever it wants to in the ocean, but it can never fly in the sky. To do that he would need to be a different creature entirely.

Likewise, man has the free-will to do and choose a wide variety of things, but he cannot choose God - or even desire God - until God first changes him into a new creature. He cannot himself change into a new nature. God changes us from earth-dwellers, **John 15:9**, to heavenly-minded pilgrims, **Psa. 73:5**; **Heb. 13:14**; He alone, through the Holy Spirit, makes us new creatures who are suited for heaven, **Col. 1:12.**

There's a War Going On
This fitting for heaven is a twofold process. When we first find faith we begin to have "this treasure in earthen vessels", our flesh. And this is when we are first made aware of the resistance of the world to our Lord and His Word. And, not only that, we also notice conflict closer to home: our two natures very much at war within ourselves, the flesh versus the spirit, **Rom. 7:18-25**.

Christ, though sinless Himself, willingly took on a flesh nature in order to rescue us:

"*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*" **- Heb. 2:14 - 15**

And we are blessed to have His ongoing help throughout our lives here on Earth. He is our faithful, compassionate High Priest:

"*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*" **- Heb. 4:14 – 16**

Salvation in Christ, a new nature, a powerful, compassionate High Priest who gives grace for our many occasions of need. Why would we want to trade any of this for ineffective and inconstant free-will?

We Live What We Believe – Or Don’t Believe

Believing or not believing in the existence of God certainly affects how a person lives their life. There is a very interesting book that illustrates this truth. It is a biography of **Cecil Rhodes**, the imperialist magnate of the 1800's, “*Diamonds, Gold, and War: The British, the Boers, and the Making of South Africa*”, by **Martin Meredith**. The author gives a provocative quote. Rhodes was influenced by…

"*a book published in 1872, 'The Martyrdom of Man' by Winwood Reade, an obscure British Darwinian who argued that man had no hope of an after-life or posthumous reward; the only reward to be found was in improving the human race. "To develop to the utmost our genius and our love, that is the only true religion," wrote Reade. Rhodes described "The Martyrdom of Man" as a 'creepy book', but added, mysteriously, that it 'made me what I am'*."

This brings to mind **Luke 6:40**:

"*A student is not above the teacher; but everyone, when he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.*"

It is so important to be "*fully trained*" by that best Book of books, a Book whose Author reads the reader, **Heb. 4:12-13**. And the Holy Spirit guides the reader, forming Christ in us. Lets not allow some far lesser book, or books, or teacher take over that position in our lives.

“*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*” **- Hebrews 4 :12-13**